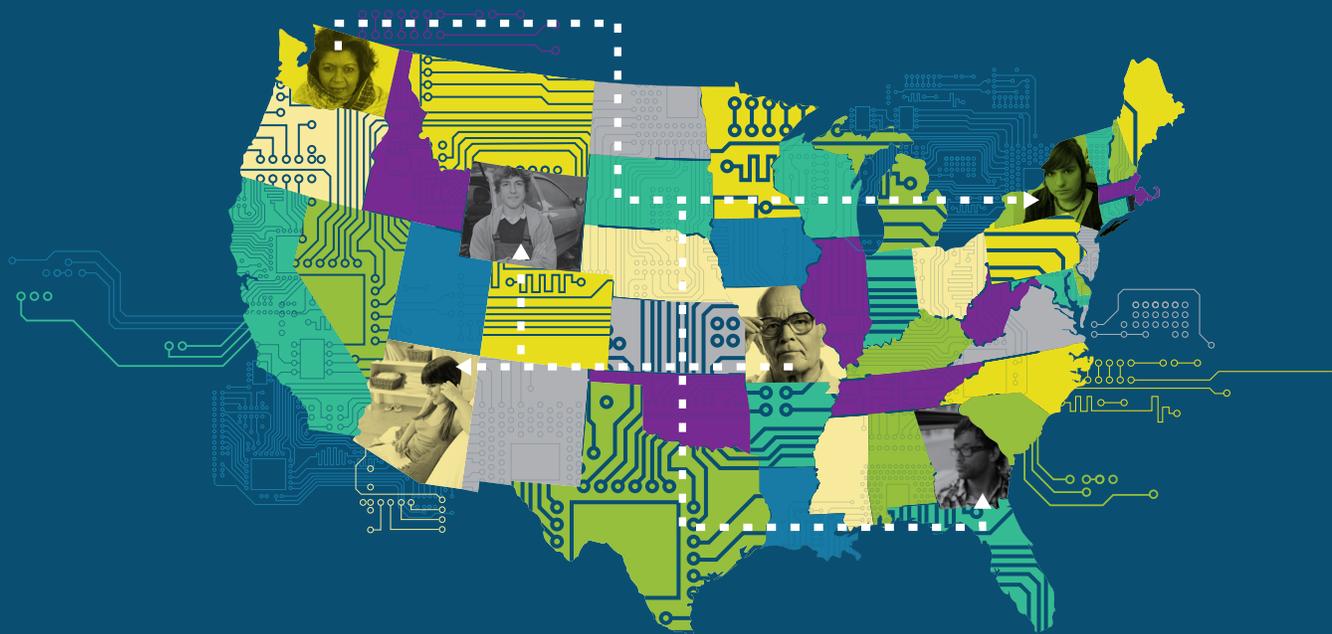


Teaching Online Across State Lines



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Teaching Online Across State Lines is the first in a series of occasional policy briefs being developed by the Evergreen Education Group's *Keeping Pace* research team. These documents are the first *Keeping Pace* research being released separately from the annual report or the website.

Executive summary

Among the ways in which states attempt to ensure quality in K-12 education is by requiring that most teachers in public schools be licensed via state-level requirements that vary by state. This patchwork of requirements has not been a problem for most teachers over the last century, because so few teachers taught in multiple states concurrently. Mechanisms to allow experienced teachers to gain a license in a new state (sometimes temporarily until obtaining a permanent license) were created by many states for teachers who moved to a new location. In addition, many states created alternative licensing mechanisms for professionals with subject-area expertise who wished to switch careers and teach in public schools.

Neither of these mechanisms is sufficient, however, for a new kind of 21st century professional—teachers who are teaching online and therefore reaching students in multiple states concurrently. These teachers often must go through a laborious and time-consuming process to become licensed in each of the states in which their students reside. Streamlining the teaching licensing process to allow teachers to more easily work across multiple states would increase high-quality online educational opportunities for students, and extend the reach of high-quality teachers.

This policy brief explores key teacher licensing issues, and proposes an online teacher specialization that would allow a licensed teacher to teach online students in multiple states.

All online teachers should be highly-qualified, licensed teachers. In addition, states should create an online teaching specialization that would allow a teacher licensed in any state to teach online students in any state without having to go through a separate licensure process in each state. This specialization would be based on online teachers meeting both of the following requirements:

- A. They demonstrate that they are licensed and highly qualified in any state, and
- B. They demonstrate expertise in teaching online via either of two methods:
 - They have taken and passed a professional development course in teaching online by an approved provider, which includes a course specific to teaching in an online environment offered by universities, regional education agencies, or national providers of accredited programs, or
 - They have successfully taught in an accredited online program for at least three years.

The creation of an online teacher specialization raises the bar for teachers who are licensed in another state, by requiring that these teachers must demonstrate that they have taken and passed a professional development course that meets state requirements or confirm they have successfully taught in an accredited online program. This approach preserves the approach to teaching online used by many individual school districts without imposing any new mandates. Licensed teachers in a district may shift to teaching online with no additional state-created requirements.

Introduction

Providers of online schools and courses often operate across multiple states, and online teachers often teach students who collectively reside in many states. Current state-level licensing requirements for teachers, however, are slowing the spread of online school and course options. This policy brief explores key teacher licensing issues, and proposes an online teacher specialization that would allow a licensed teacher to teach online students in multiple states. This approach would increase opportunities for students while increasing the quality of online teaching.

Among the ways in which states attempt to ensure quality in K-12 education is by requiring that most teachers in public schools be licensed.¹ Teacher licensing has a long history that extends over the past century. Initially schools created their own guidelines for teaching requirements,² and then in the first half of the 20th century states created state-level requirements – although each state was, and remains, different.³ Individual state requirements differ greatly; variations may be in the basic requirements that teachers must meet, such as required classes or the number of hours, or in the type of license.

This patchwork of requirements has not been a problem for most teachers over the last century, because so few teachers taught in multiple states concurrently. Mechanisms to allow experienced teachers to gain a license in a new state (sometimes temporarily until obtaining a permanent license) were created by many states for teachers who moved to a new location. In addition, many states created alternative licensing mechanisms for professionals with subject-area expertise who wished to switch careers and teach in public schools.

Neither of these mechanisms is sufficient, however, for a new kind of 21st century professional—teachers who are teaching online and therefore able to reach students in multiple states concurrently. These teachers often must go through a laborious and time-consuming process to become licensed in each of the states in which their students reside.

During school year 2013-14 several million public school students took individual online courses, and hundreds of thousands of students attended fully online schools. Many of these students are taking courses or attending schools that are staffed by teachers employed by providers who are offering educational options across multiple states. The national providers include public agencies, private non-profit organizations, and private for-profit companies. For example:

- The Florida Virtual School (FLVS), a public state virtual school that offers supplemental classes and a full-time school, has been offering online courses for over 15 years. It serves hundreds of thousands of Florida students, and has demonstrated that it provides excellent results in a cost-effective way.⁴ Through its FLVS Global division, it offers teacher-led courses to students in other states and in many countries around the world.
- The non-profit Virtual High School (VHS) originally started in 1996 as a pilot program funded by a federal education grant, and then spun off into an independent 501(c)(3) organization in 2001. Since then, the organization has grown into a worldwide collaborative of schools, teachers and students with more than 700 member schools and 17,000 enrolled students in 40 states and 34 countries. It serves

¹ Whether or not teacher licensing is in fact increasing quality of outcomes is a separate question that this policy brief does not address.

² Coggshall, J., Sexton, S., (May 2008), Teachers on the Move: A Look at Teacher Interstate Mobility Policy and Practice. Learning Point Associates. <http://www.gtcenter.org/sites/default/files/docs/NASDTECReportTeachersOnTheMove.pdf>

³ Teach.com, Certification Requirements in all 50 states, <http://teach.com/where>. A brief overview of requirements in all 50 states can also be found at <http://www.lakeforest.edu/live/files/1495-state-certification-reciprocity1.pdf>.

⁴ FloridaTaxWatch. Final Report: A Comprehensive Report of Florida Virtual School; www.scribd.com/doc/47743217/Florida-Virtual-School-Report

students through a collaborative model in which schools can contribute a teacher’s time to teach one course in exchange for student seats in any VHS class. This allows teachers from any member school to teach students from any member school – regardless of which state each lives in. For the many schools that cannot contribute a teacher to the program and simply want to enroll students in courses, VHS provides the teacher.

- Several for-profit providers, including Connections Education and K12 Inc., offer individual online courses and entire online schools. Connections and K12 Inc. provide individual courses to public schools in all 50 states, and between them operate online schools in 33 states.

These and other providers are making available a wide variety of classes, including varied electives, core, honors, dual enrollment, and credit recovery classes, to every student across the country. The state-level licensing requirements, however, are slowing the growth of online learning options for students in many states. These barriers are making teaching across state lines, and serving high-need students, needlessly difficult.

Better options are possible, and in particular reducing the barriers to teaching across state lines would streamline opportunities for teachers, students, and providers. High-quality teachers would be able to reach more students, students would have access to those teachers and to a broader course catalog, and providers would be able to use the best teacher for each class, regardless of where that teacher is licensed or located.

The complexities of licensure, discussed below, make this a difficult—but not impossible—task. The key component of a possible solution is that it must maintain the quality of online teaching, as the effectiveness of teachers in online classrooms is as important as the effectiveness of teachers in physical classrooms.

This report is divided into several sections plus an appendix. “Background issues in teacher licensing” explores the following topics:

- licensing and professional development requirements for online teachers,
- teacher testing,
- national licensing for teachers,
- charter school exemptions from teacher certification requirements,
- alternative certification paths for teachers, and
- reciprocity agreements between states.

This section concludes with the observation that neither the exemptions, alternative paths, nor the reciprocity agreements sufficiently address the issue of teaching online across multiple states.

“A new specialization path for online teachers” proposes a new solution: allowing online teachers to be fully certified in one state, and then be allowed to teach in additional states by completing professional development in teaching online. This approach would raise the bar on teaching online by ensuring that teachers are licensed in their area of expertise and are experienced in teaching online.

The appendix explores current state-specific requirements in a handful of states with extensive online learning activity.

Background issues in teacher licensing

Discussions of teaching online across state lines touch on many complex topics. This section provides background information on these issues to inform readers who are not fully versed in the myriad teacher licensing issues.

Variations in teacher licensing requirements

State requirements for teachers vary considerably. For example, licenses differ by:

- Grade levels: According to the National Governors Association, 29 states require separate licensing for middle school teachers, while others may license for grades K-8 or grades 6-12.⁵
- Required coursework: Some states have undergraduate credit hour requirements in order to attain a license. In Utah, for example, a teaching major shall include not fewer than 30 semester or 45 quarter hours of credit derived from required and elective courses offered in a given subject field.
- Test scores: All states have required teacher tests, and 46 states use the PRAXIS exams offered by Educational Testing Service (ETS). In addition, some states have minimum score requirements that may be subject-area dependent.
- License type: Licenses differ by job type, with small differences between states. Examples of specific licenses include a grades K-8 teacher, elementary school special education teacher, high school counselor, high school math teacher, or principal. Tennessee, for example, has 46 possible licenses⁶ for grades K-12 that allow school employees to specialize in grade levels, job type, special education, and different subject areas. A typical elementary school teacher may only need a general certification that includes the grade level he wants to teach, while a high school teacher may also need to add a subject area certification. Counselors, special education teachers, physical education teachers, and librarians are just some of the examples of additional areas of specialization in Tennessee. This is just one example; each state has different requirements for different school jobs.

Teacher testing

A key component of teacher licensure in each state is passing an assessment; some of these tests are nationally accepted and may form the basis for teachers to be licensed across multiple states. In addition to the national teaching exams, many states have developed their own tests.

The PRAXIS series is the most commonly used set of tests; there are tests for candidates seeking to enter a teacher preparation program, for graduates of teacher preparation programs seeking licensure, and for specific content areas.⁷ The PRAXIS tests are accepted in 46 states (not in Arizona, Florida, Illinois, and Massachusetts), however, the test may only be accepted for certain specialties within those states, and the

⁵ Grossman, T., Middle School Teacher Certification (National Governors Association). <http://www.nga.org/files/live/sites/NGA/files/pdf/1110EARLYDROPGROSSMAN.PDF>

⁶ Tennessee Department of Education, Tennessee Licensure Standards and Induction Guidelines, <http://www.state.tn.us/education/lic/doc/accttchlicstds.pdf>

⁷ PRAXIS Series overview, https://www.ets.org/praxis/about?WT.ac=praxishome_about_121126

required score varies by state and content area.⁸ For example, in Michigan teachers must take the Michigan Test for Teacher Certification, but administrators take the PRAXIS exams.

A newer national set of tests has been developed by the National Evaluation Series (NES).⁹ NES Tests cover a broad spectrum of academic subjects, ranging from math and English to technological skills and teaching English as a Second Language. NES has set national benchmarks, however, states may set their own passing scores. As the NES is a newer set of tests, Arizona, New Mexico, Oregon, and Wisconsin are the only states that accept the tests at this time.

As many as half of the states have developed their own state-specific licensing tests. For example, a teacher can pass the California Basic Education Skills Test (CBEST) for certification in California, but to teach in New York, the teacher would need to pass a test administered by the New York State Teacher Certification Examinations (NYSTCE).

Many states allow out-of-state applicants for licensure to request that tests taken in another state be accepted in lieu of taking another round of tests, or allow exemptions for teachers who have valid teaching certificates from another state along with significant teaching experience. However, these are typically handled on a case-by-case basis and still require the candidate complete an application packet (and usually submit an application fee) in order to be considered.

Charter school exemptions from state teacher certification requirements

Many state charter school laws allow for some level of exemption from teacher certification requirements and from highly-qualified teacher requirements. NCLB requires that all core subject teachers are highly qualified, however, it gives each state flexibility to set its own definition of highly qualified in its charter school law. In their charter school laws, some states allow a certain percentage of teachers to not be highly qualified, which may be different from the NCLB guidelines. In Texas, for example, teachers in charter schools are only required to have a high school diploma, and only special education and bilingual teachers must be licensed.¹⁰ These provisions apply only to charter schools, so do not address the issue for providers of individual courses, or non-charter online schools.

In Illinois, the law gives flexibility to charter schools operating in a city having a population exceeding 500,000, which only applies to the city of Chicago. The law states that “at least 50% of the individuals employed in instructional positions by a charter school ... that is established on or after April 16, 2003 ... shall hold teaching certificates.” A charter school has three years from the date it opens to meet that requirement.¹¹

New York’s charter school policies are more complicated. In New York, a charter school may employ:

- “uncertified teachers with at least three years of elementary, middle, or secondary classroom teaching experience;
- tenured or tenure-track college faculty;
- individuals with two years of satisfactory experience through the Teach for America program; and
- individuals with exceptional business, professional, artistic, athletic, or military experience.”

⁸ PRAXIS Series Passing Scores by Test and State as of March 1, 2014, https://www.ets.org/s/praxis/pdf/passing_scores.pdf

⁹ National Evaluation Series, <https://www.nestest.com/>

¹⁰ Texas Guidance for the Implementation of NCLB Highly Qualified Teacher Requirements For Special Education Teachers, See question 14, <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/assets/0/1582/1624/3374d52c-bdf9-4743-9321-2567792913f7.pdf>

¹¹ (105 ILCS 5/27A-10), Sec. 27A-10. Employees, Section C-5; <http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/ilcs4.asp?DocName=010500050HArt%2E+27A&ActID=1005&ChapterID=17&SeqStart=164500000&SeqEnd=166400000>

New York's guidelines limit how many noncertified teachers with the above qualifications may be hired to no more than five teachers or 30% of the teaching staff of the charter school, whichever is less.¹²

North Carolina passed SB337 in 2013 which states that for charter schools "at least 50% of ... all teachers who are teaching in the core subject areas of mathematics, science, social studies, and language arts shall be college graduates."^{13,14}

National teaching licenses

Two organizations are currently offering a national certification. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards has created the National Board Certification, which complements and does not replace state licenses in most cases.¹⁵ In Oklahoma, for example, the National Board Certification makes teachers eligible for a salary bonus. However, National Board Certification areas do not correspond to Oklahoma certification areas; therefore, teachers must hold an appropriate Oklahoma certificate in addition to National Board Certification in order to teach that subject.

The American Board for Certification of Teaching Success is being used by some states to replace state licensing requirements. The American Board launched a certification program in 2001 with a grant from the U.S. Department of Education that is geared primarily toward professionals who are changing careers and seeking a teaching license. Candidates must have a bachelor's degree and pass a background check, and then work through a one-year online education program. The certification can be in one of nine areas including elementary education, special education, or seven high school content areas. It is accepted by 11 states (Arizona, Florida, Idaho, Mississippi, Missouri, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Utah) for a full license, as well as by some charter schools and private schools.¹⁶ Once a teacher has completed the program and worked in one of those states, the license is accepted by all 11 states. In addition, teachers may add other subject areas not offered by the American Board by taking PRAXIS exams. However, the American Board certification is geared toward professionals changing careers and so is less helpful in its current form for most current teachers looking to teach in multiple states concurrently.

Licensing or professional development requirements for online teachers

An issue related to licensing of online teachers is whether states are creating any licensing or professional development requirements that are specific to online teachers. In most cases, the answer is no.

As of school year 2013-14, no states have a separate licensing requirement for online teachers, and very few states have a professional development requirement specific to online teaching. Kansas requires online providers to confirm they are providing adequate training to virtual teachers. Maryland requires training as part of Maryland State Department of Education Process and Procedures.¹⁷ In Minnesota, beginning in June 2014, all colleges and universities providing classroom teacher licensure must include the knowledge and skills teacher candidates needed to deliver digital and blended learning and curriculum; staff development activities must further these goals. This is true for all teachers statewide, online or face-to-face (SF 1528).¹⁸

¹² New York State Education Department. (n.d.). Laws of New York, Article 56, Section 2854. [http://public.leginfo.state.ny.us/LAWSSEAF.cgi?QUERYTYPE=LAWS+&QUERYDATA=\\$\\$EDN2854\\$\\$@TXEDN02854+&LIST=LAW+&BROWSER=EXPLORER+&TO](http://public.leginfo.state.ny.us/LAWSSEAF.cgi?QUERYTYPE=LAWS+&QUERYDATA=$$EDN2854$$@TXEDN02854+&LIST=LAW+&BROWSER=EXPLORER+&TO)

¹³ North Carolina SB337 (2013), <http://www.ncleg.net/Sessions/2013/Bills/Senate/PDF/S337v9.pdf>

¹⁴ The Education Commission for the States has published a list of all states that allow exemptions for the certification of charter school teachers, available at <http://mb2.ecs.org/reports/Report.aspx?id=93>.

¹⁵ National Board for Professional Teaching Standards; <http://www.nbpts.org/>

¹⁶ American Board for Certification of Teaching Success; <http://abcte.org/>

¹⁷ MSDE Process and Procedures for Offering Student Online Courses in Maryland Public Schools; retrieved July 25, 2014, http://mdk12online.org/docs/Process_and_Procedures.pdf

¹⁸ SF1528 (2012); retrieved July 25, 2014, <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/bin/bldbill.php?bill=S1528.3.html&session=ls87>

Virginia HB578 (2012)¹⁹ stated that the Board of Education must provide new licensure requirements for teachers who teach only online courses; the rules are still in development as of spring 2014. The Texas Virtual School Network, through which most but not all supplemental and full-time online activity in the state is funneled, has a professional development requirement all teachers must pass prior to teach online students.²⁰

Alternative certifications

In order to address a shortage of teachers in rural areas, particular subject areas, and other areas of high need, every state in the country has developed²¹ some type of nontraditional route to teacher licensing that is designed to allow those without a four-year undergraduate teacher preparation degree to become teachers.²² These paths vary, and may look very similar to a traditional four-year degree program (in which case they are often not well utilized²³), or they may provide an expedited path that allows candidates to begin a paid teaching position while completing coursework. In most cases, however, the requirements are significant and not easily completed for multiple states. The following examples are illustrative.

¹⁹ HB578 (2012); retrieved July 25, 2014, <http://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?121+sum+HB578>

²⁰ TxVSN Teacher Professional Development requirement, <http://www.txvsn.org/portal/AboutUs/FAQ.aspx#Online%20Instructors>

²¹ National Association for Alternative Certification, <http://www.alt-teacher.org/index.asp>

²² Alternative certification requirements by state can be found at <http://www.teaching-certification.com/alternative-teaching-certification.html>.

²³ Nadler, D., and Peterson, P. (Winter 2009). What Happens When States Have Genuine Alternative Certification? Education Next, <http://educationnext.org/what-happens-when-states-have-genuine-alternative-certification/>.

The challenges of teaching across state lines

Following is an excerpt from an unpublished account provided by Matt Vangalis, Principal of FLVS Global School, the national and international arm of Florida Virtual School (FLVS) and a non-profit provider of online courses and teachers, showing how the ideas presented in this policy brief are affecting one school and the students it seeks to serve.

This week I received an email from one of our managers in Pennsylvania. He did a presentation at a local school district that has 100 students in need of highly qualified Advanced Placement (AP) instructors for its students. FLVS Global School is fully accredited, and has NCAA-approved courses with teachers available. This should be a good fit, but state teacher certification requirements will prevent us from serving those students.

Many states currently require teachers who teach students in that state to hold a valid state teaching certificate. FLVS requires its teachers to be certified in the state of Florida. This makes sense, as we would not want unqualified teachers being placed in front of students without checks and balances in place to ensure the students were receiving proper educational experiences. Sometimes, however, a specific state certification requirement does not improve educational outcomes. For example:

- Virginia requires that our teachers be certified in CPR even though they will never physically see these students face-to-face in a setting where CPR could be administered. With this and other requirements, I estimate that these steps would require ten hours of effort by our teachers. The process includes completing applications, requesting transcripts, taking CPR classes, tracking down college admissions addresses, getting money orders and then mailing the documents. The financial and time cost is a significant deterrent to offering courses in Virginia.
- Our Chinese teacher who speaks fluent Cantonese and went to college in China was denied certification in Wisconsin because she did not have enough “Chinese” classes on her transcript. A lack of good Chinese teachers exists in most states, and students in Wisconsin now have one less option.
- One of our teachers who graduated from college with a triple major was required to travel to Illinois to sit for the equivalent of a basic skills test in reading, writing and mathematics. Neither her college transcript nor her certifications in other states were deemed sufficient to demonstrate basic skills. Illinois requires that our teachers take 12 credit hours of additional coursework as part of its requirements for a professional license. The total cost is estimated at \$1,835 per teacher.
- Pennsylvania requires our teachers to submit a health certificate signed by a physician indicating they are in good health. The cost for the initial application for state certification is well over \$8,000 per teacher.
- “Reciprocity” is often misleading. Teachers still must apply and in many cases will be required to take an exam.

What it really boils down to is this: great teachers teach. It shouldn't matter where you became a great teacher. If teachers hold a valid teaching certificate with multiple years (3+) of successful experience, they should be eligible for some kind of on-line teaching certificate that would be accepted by all 50 states. There are students in remote locations that do not have access to great teachers or districts that cannot afford to hire a teacher for a small number of students who wish to take a class. Online schools with great teachers can help to solve this problem, but we are being restricted by current state certification requirements.

- Colorado candidates for alternative certification must first receive a Statement of Eligibility from the Colorado Department of Education. Candidates must receive qualifying scores on the Colorado-specific PLACE test or the PRAXIS-II test, must have at least a bachelor's degree, and must have completed 24 semester hours of credit in the content area or passed the Colorado State Board-approved content exam if seeking content area licensure. The candidate may only apply to the one or two-year Alternative Teacher Candidate Licensing program after securing a teaching position; the licensing program must include supervised classroom experience.
- Oklahoma's primary alternative path to certification is through the Teacher Professional Development Residency Program, which provides for a three-member Residency Committee for each first-year teacher licensed by the State Board of Education that includes a principal, a mentor teacher, and a university teacher educator. This committee works with teachers in their first year, and then can make a recommendation as to whether the teacher should receive a license, be monitored for an additional year, or should not receive a license.²⁴

While alternative certification may provide an expedited path to teaching, there is some question about whether teachers certified through alternate paths are considered "highly qualified" under No Child Left Behind (NCLB). NCLB defined highly qualified teachers as having 1) a bachelor's degree, 2) a full state certification or licensure, and 3) proof that they know each subject they teach. As a result, provisionally licensed teachers are not considered highly qualified. Waivers allow alternatively-certified teachers to be considered highly qualified if they finish a teacher preparation program within three years, but the latest of those waivers expires after the 2013-14 school year, and will require Congressional action to remedy.

For all the reasons explored above, alternative certification paths are not a viable option for teachers seeking to teach online in multiple states.

Teacher reciprocity agreements

Another approach that states have taken to create an alternative path for teachers is the creation of reciprocity agreements with other states. Similar to alternative certifications, however, the patchwork of reciprocity agreements is neither easily understood nor very powerful. Elements of these agreements include:

- They vary between states, and are often not mutual (e.g., State A accepts teachers from State B, but State B does not accept teachers from State A).
- They may be only partial or temporary, i.e. participants may be required to complete additional coursework, assessments, or classroom experience in order to receive a full professional certificate in another state.

Several organizations help teachers and multi-state schools understand these issues, but no simple reciprocity solution exists today (see Table 1 for a list of teacher licensing and testing organizations). The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) is one of a handful of organizations that tracks the states that have established agreements or contracts that make it easier and more efficient for educators from one state to become credentialed to work in another state. Twenty states have signed an agreement with NCATE.²⁵ Several states have reciprocity agreements that allow NCATE graduates to transfer their existing teacher license from one state to another without having to complete additional coursework. Most states also require a satisfactory score on state licensing exam(s). In states without a reciprocity agreement, there may be additional requirements.

²⁴ Oklahoma Alternative Placement Program, <http://ok.gov/sde/faqs/oklahoma-alternative-placement-program>

²⁵ National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, <http://www.ncate.org/Public/CurrentFutureTeachers/ReciprocityandAcceptance/RecentNCATEGraduatesFutureTeachers/tabid/602/Default.aspx>

The NASDTEC Interstate Agreement is a collection of 50 individual agreements that facilitate the movement of educators among member states and other jurisdictions. It includes 44 states, the District of Columbia, Guam, and some Canadian provinces, and licenses for teachers, administrators, career / technical education personnel, and other service personnel.²⁶

| | Focus | Which states? | Target audience |
|--|---|---|---|
| American Board for Certification of Teaching Success | Teacher certification across multiple states | Accepted in 11 states | Geared toward professionals changing careers to become teachers |
| National Board Certification | Teacher certification | Varies by state and possibly district. May include assistance with fees, salary increases, bonuses, or graduate credit. | Geared toward licensed teachers |
| PRAXIS Tests | Pre-license testing for teachers | By 44 states, but each state may have different standards and accept different tests | Teacher licensure candidates |
| National Teacher Exams | Pre-license testing for teachers | Replaced by PRAXIS in 1999 but still relevant for some teachers who maintained licensure. | Teacher licensure candidates |
| State-specific exams | Pre-license testing for teachers in 25 states | Usually only accepted in state it was created in, although some states may allow candidates to transfer in | Teacher licensure candidates |
| NASDTEC Interstate Agreement | Simplifies process of licensing teachers in multiple states | 44 states | Teachers seeking to teach in another state |
| National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) | Simplifies process of licensing teachers in multiple states | 20 states | Teachers seeking to teach in another state |

Table 1: Teacher licensing and testing organizations

Existing alternative licensing options do not address the problem for teachers teaching online in multiple states

Policymakers who are not deeply aware of the ways in which alternative certifications and teacher reciprocity work in multiple states often believe that one or both of those options make teaching across state lines easy. As described above, neither of these approaches is in fact a viable solution, because they are limited, cumbersome, and time-consuming for teachers. Section II proposes a viable alternative.

²⁶ NASDTEC Interstate Agreement; <http://www.nasdtec.net/?page=Interstate>

A new specialization path for online teachers

A solution exists that would allow licensed teachers to more easily teach in multiple states, while not just preserving teaching quality but in fact augmenting online teacher skills. States that take this approach would create an online teacher specialization, which would allow online teachers to work in the state's online schools and courses, if they meet either of two licensing paths. The first path is the current option used by online teachers in most states.

Path 1 (current option)

TEACHERS HAVE A TEACHING LICENSE AND ASSOCIATED GRADE-SPECIFIC OR CONTENT-SPECIFIC CERTIFICATIONS IN EACH STATE IN WHICH THEY TEACH.

–OR–

Path 2

TEACHERS MEET BOTH OF THE FOLLOWING REQUIREMENTS:

- A. They demonstrate that they are licensed and highly qualified in any state, and
- B. They demonstrate expertise in teaching online via either of two methods:
 - i) They have taken and passed a professional development course in teaching online by an approved provider, which includes a course specific to teaching in an online environment offered by universities, regional education agencies, or national providers of accredited programs, or
 - ii) They have successfully taught in an accredited online program for at least three years.

The creation of an online teacher specialization raises the bar for teachers who are licensed in another state, by requiring that these teachers must demonstrate that they have taken and passed a professional development course that meets state requirements or confirm they have successfully taught in an accredited online program.

The professional development should address issues that go well beyond the technical knowledge and skill to teach via an online technology platform, to cover best practices in online pedagogy. Topics covered should include how to engage with students at a distance, providing meaningful feedback, using data to personalize instruction for each student, addressing concerns about cheating in the online class, creating authentic learning experiences, and other similar issues.

In addition to these requirements, teachers would have to continue to go through state-specific security procedures, such as getting their fingerprints taken and submitting them to the appropriate office in each state that runs background checks.

This solution preserves the approach to teaching online used by many individual school districts without imposing any new mandates. Licensed teachers in a district may shift to teaching online with no additional state-created requirements.

All highly qualified, licensed teachers who complete Path 2 and take the professional development opportunity, or have previous online teaching experience in an accredited online program, would receive a specialization in online teaching. Teachers with this specialization would be authorized to teach any student in any of the states that have approved the specialization.

Key Definitions

A number of terms are used to refer to the different types of teacher licenses, and the terms are not uniform across the country. The following definitions are taken from a glossary published by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, which accredits over 900 educator preparation programs nationwide. It uses the following terminology:

TEACHING LICENSE / CREDENTIAL:

“An official document issued by a state agency that an individual meets state requirements to (1) teach at a specific level or for a specialized discipline/population of students (e.g. middle grades, biology, English Language Learners, etc.); or (2) serve in a specific education role in a school (e.g. principal, reading specialist, etc.). (See Licensure or Licensure Level).”

CERTIFICATE:

“An official document issued by a state agency that an individual meets state requirements to (1) teach at a specific level or for a specialized discipline/population of students (e.g. middle grades, biology, English Language Learners, etc.); or (2) serve in a specific education role in a school (e.g. principal, reading specialist, etc.).”

ENDORSEMENT:

“An addition to an educator’s license or certification that officially sanctions an educator’s fulfillment of preparation requirements to teach a subject different from that specified on the original license/certificate, to work with another group or age level of students, or to provide professional services in schools.” These are also known as special service areas.

We are recommending an “online teaching specialization” because it is not an endorsement or certificate, both of which have very particular meanings in the context of NCLB. However, similar to an endorsement, an online teaching specialization builds upon an existing license, and would qualify teachers for the specific job of teaching online.

Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), <http://caepnet.org/resources/glossary/>

Conclusion: Looking to the future

The policy changes proposed in the previous section would, if implemented, create a new path for online teachers who wish to teach students who reside in multiple states. It represents a relatively easy way to increase opportunities for teachers to teach, and to provide students more online courses options taught by the best teachers from the entire country—not just those who happen to live in the same state.

It purposely does not suggest large-scale changes to the current teacher certification processes that states are using. Many observers believe that current certification processes provide little or no benefit to students, and are an impediment to innovation. Some advocates believe that large-scale changes are needed to provide far more flexibility for educators to find the right mix of teachers to serve students and then hold the providers accountable for student outcomes. Completely replacing current certification, however, will likely take many years due to the many stakeholders involved. This policy brief suggests a smaller-scale change that can be implemented quickly and relatively easily, and will have real, near-term benefits for both students and teachers.

We expect that in the coming years teacher certification is likely to change further, and the policies that we are proposing may be an interim step towards a larger transformation. Many states are implementing or considering new teacher evaluation processes that are based in part on student achievement outcomes. To the extent that these changes are successfully implemented, and to the extent that they are able to assess teachers quickly based on student data, they will make inputs-based quality assurance methods—including teacher licensing—less important than they are currently. It is likely that some type of teacher licensing will always be necessary, if only to address the period in between when a teacher begins teaching and when data are first generated. Current practices, however, may give way to generally streamlined processes with a goal of moving more of the best-qualified teachers into classrooms (virtual or physical) so that more students are learning from excellent teachers.

That change is likely years away. In the meantime, the steps outlined in this report will increase the ability of teachers to work across state lines. By improving the quality of instruction while streamlining the process by which teachers can work in multiple states, policymakers can allow teachers to focus on what they do best—working with students.

Appendix A

Current state online learning options and teacher licensure requirements in select states

Louisiana

Online learning options

Louisiana has two fully online charter schools, an increasing number of district programs, and a state Course Choice program. Louisiana's two fully online charter schools are authorized by the Louisiana State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE): the Louisiana Connections Academy (LACA) and Louisiana Virtual Charter Academy (LAVCA). LACA enrollment is capped at 1,200 students. For school year 2012-13 and 2013-14, LACA enrolled 350 students in grades K-5, 385 students in grades 6-8, and 465 students in grades 9-12.²⁷ LAVCA, a K12 Inc. school, is available to Louisiana students in grades K-12; in school year 2012-13 there were 1,362 enrolled students, reflecting an annual increase of 9%. These two fully online schools serve slightly less than 0.5% of the state's K-12 student population.

Through school year 2012-13, Louisiana had a state virtual school, Louisiana Virtual School (LVS). In 2012 Act 2 (HB976) introduced the Course Choice program.²⁸ Under Course Choice, all students select their own online and hybrid courses, with district approval, from 45 authorized private and out-of-district providers, including vendors such as Apex, Connections, Edgenuity, K12 Inc., and Princeton Review, and also Louisiana universities, community colleges, and school districts.²⁹

Early challenges to the program's legality, and particularly of its funding model, were raised. Following a Louisiana Supreme Court ruling mid-2013 that per-pupil allocation funds could not be diverted outside of public schools, funding shifted and is based on a state appropriation and grant funding (instead of tapping into the public education funding formula). As of spring 2014, registration is open for the 2014-15 school year, but long-term funding has not yet been secured.

Teacher licensure requirements

Louisiana issues three categories of teaching authorizations: Standard, Nonstandard, and Ancillary.³⁰ Within the Standard teaching authorization, there are eight types teaching authorizations issued by the state:

1. professional Level 1, 2, and 3 certificates;
2. type C, B, and A certificates;
3. out-of-state certificate;
4. foreign language special certificate PK-8;

²⁷ Keeping Pace with K-12 Online and Blended Learning 2013

²⁸ HB976 (Act 2); <http://www.legis.la.gov/Legis/BillInfo.aspx?i=220608>

²⁹ Louisiana Course Choice; <http://www.louisianacoursechoice.net/>

³⁰ Legislation and Board of Elementary and Secondary Education rules are outlined in Bulletin 746: Louisiana Standards for Certification of School Personnel, available at <http://www.doa.louisiana.gov/osr/lac/28v131/28v131.doc>.

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5. practitioner 1, 2, and 3 licenses;
6. world language certificates (WLC);
7. extended endorsement license (EEL); and
8. standard certificates for teachers in non-public schools.

According to the Louisiana Department of Education,³¹ the state offers two types of teaching certificates to applicants holding a standard out-of-state teaching certificate. Both are valid certificates and make the holder eligible for a teaching assignment in a Louisiana classroom. The certificate that is issued to the applicant depends on whether or not the applicant has met Louisiana's Praxis and/or National Teacher Examination (NTE) testing requirements.³²

1. Level 1 Professional Certificate is a standard, three-year Louisiana teaching certificate that authorizes certification for the levels or subjects available in Louisiana and that are consistent with those currently on the applicant's Out-of-State teaching certificate. A Level 1 certificate is issued to individuals who have completed the Louisiana PRAXIS and/or NTE requirements.
2. Out-of-State Certificate is a standard, three-year, non-renewable Louisiana teaching certificate that authorizes certification for the levels or subjects available in Louisiana and that are consistent with those currently on the applicant's Out-of-State teaching certificate. An Out-of-State certificate is issued to individuals who have not met Louisiana's PRAXIS and/or NTE requirements.

According to the Course Choice Year 2 Request for Applications guide, all teachers must be certified per Louisiana requirements.³³ In addition, in 2013 the Department of Education published updated state standards in Bulletin 741 (Louisiana Handbook for School Administrators)³⁴ that are relevant to all education providers, including both full-time online programs and Course Choice providers. The bulletin specifies requirements for teachers, noting that all teachers must be highly qualified. However, additional guidance suggests that teachers may be "in compliance with the reciprocal instructor certification policy for instructors who reside in other states but are employed by authorized course providers to satisfy the state certification requirements."³⁵

The initial out-of-state teacher application requires an extensive packet of information, including state-specific forms and a \$50 processing fee. While the provisional license is granted for three years, they must pass the PRAXIS or have passed the NTE in order to receive a full license.

³¹ Louisiana Department of Education, Out-of-State Applicant guidelines, <https://www.teachlouisiana.net/Teachers.aspx?PageID=3204#OS>. The full application can be found at https://www.teachlouisiana.net/pdf/applications/Out_of_State.pdf.

³² The National Teacher Examination was replaced by PRAXIS exams in 1999, but teachers with NTE scores can still use them for licensing in some states.

³³ State Superintendent of Education John White, Course Choice Year 2 Request for Applications (RFA):2013 Louisiana Course Choice Application Guide, September 25, 2013, <http://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/course-choice/course-choice-rfa-yr-2.pdf?sfvrsn=2>

³⁴ Bulletin 741 (Louisiana Handbook For School Administrators); <http://www.doa.louisiana.gov/osr/lac/28v115/28v115.doc>

³⁵ Bulletin 132, <http://www.doa.louisiana.gov/osr/lac/28v151/28v151.doc>

Michigan

Online options

Michigan has extensive online and blended learning activity, and has seen significant expansion of its online options in recent years due to two key pieces of legislation. Online schools and programs include the following:

- Seven online charter schools, two of which operated in school year 2012-13, and five of which opened in school year 2013-14. The number of cyber charters expanded in the wake of the passage of SB619 (2012),³⁶ which raised the cap on the number of fully online schools, referred to as cyber charter schools. Full-time online programs are serving 0.55% of the state's K-12 student population.
- Michigan Virtual School (MVS), which is one of the larger state virtual schools, with 20,812 course enrollments in school year 2012-13, a 5% annual increase.
- A large consortium program, GenNET, operated by the Genesee ISD with over 400 districts participating and processing more than 22,749 course enrollments supplied by multiple providers in school year 2012-13.
- A new course choice program. Public Act 60 (2013)³⁷ allows students in grades 5-12, with parental consent, to take up to two online courses per academic term, semester, or trimester without district approval beginning in school year 2013-14, and increases funding for Michigan Virtual University (MVU) to support a variety of digital learning initiatives.³⁸ Available courses will be listed in a statewide catalog or those offered by the student's resident district. The statewide catalog is being developed and maintained by MVU for school year 2013-14; it will include online courses from any district that elects to accept applications for enrollment from nonresident students, as well as course titles from MVS.
- A report by the Michigan Virtual University estimated that 185,053 K-12 course enrollments were delivered virtually in 2012-13.³⁹

In addition, Michigan has an online learning experience graduation requirement for all high school students.

Teacher licensure requirements

Michigan currently issues two types of teaching certificates to in-state candidates for licensure, a Provisional Certificate and a Professional Education Certificate. The Provisional Certificate is an initial certificate valid for six years, during which time the holder is expected to gain experience as a teacher, and to participate in professional development. The Professional Education Certificate is an advanced certificate that requires 18 semester hours in a planned course of study (such as a master's degree), completion of Michigan's reading requirement, and three years of successful teaching experience.

³⁶ SB619 (2012); retrieved July 25, 2014, <http://www.legislature.mi.gov/documents/2011-2012/publicact/pdf/2012-PA-0129.pdf>

³⁷ Public Act 60 (2013); retrieved July 25, 2014, <http://legislature.mi.gov/documents/2013-2014/publicact/pdf/2013-PA-0060.pdf>

³⁸ MVU is a private nonprofit entity funded by annual legislative appropriations, course tuition, and private grants, and operates MVS and the Michigan Virtual Learning Research Institute.

³⁹ Freidhoff, J. R., DeBruiler, K., & Kennedy, K. (2014). Michigan's K-12 virtual learning effectiveness report. Lansing, MI: Michigan Virtual Learning Research Institute at MVU. Retrieved July 7, 2014 from http://media.mivu.org/institute/pdf/effectiveness_report_2013.pdf

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Teachers who hold an out-of-state license and wish to teach in Michigan have two options.⁴⁰ A Temporary Teacher Employment Authorization will be issued if individuals possess a valid out-of-state teaching certificate and have met all requirements for the Michigan Provisional certificate, except passing the Michigan Test for Teacher Certification (MTTC), and have completed the following:

1. Application for Michigan Provisional/Professional Education Certificate for Candidates Who Completed An Out-of-State/Out-of-Country Teacher Preparation Program.
2. Submission of all required documents; i.e., copies of out-of-state certificate(s), college transcript(s)/ foreign evaluation and experience reports (if applicable). These documents must be submitted with the application.
3. Payment of appropriate fee.

Alternatively, a Michigan Professional Education certificate may be issued to an applicant who:

1. Holds a valid out-of-state teaching certificate (and has never held a Michigan teaching certificate).
2. Holds a master's or higher degree earned at any time or has completed at least 18 semester credit hours in a planned program following the issuance of their initial teaching certificate or license.
3. Has, following the issuance of their initial teaching certificate or license, completed 3 years of successful teaching experience within the validity of their out-of-state certificate. Documentation using the experience report form, provided with the application, is required.
4. Has completed Michigan's reading credit requirement of 3 semester hours of teaching reading for the secondary level certificate, or 6 semester hours of teaching reading for the elementary level certificate.

If all the requirements above are met, a Michigan Professional Education certificate may be issued, and the Michigan Test for Teacher Certification will not be required.

If an out-of-state license was obtained through an alternate route to certification, the candidate is required to complete three years of teaching experience within the validity of the out-of-state regular standard teaching certificate.

⁴⁰ Michigan Department of Education, Initial In-State/Out-of-State Teacher Certification, https://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,4615,7-140-6530_5683-17063--,00.html

Oklahoma

Oklahoma has four fully online schools and two supplemental online programs operating statewide, as well as several district programs.

The Oklahoma Department of Education reports 10,585⁴¹ unique students took online courses in school year 2012-13 through 17 approved full-time and supplemental online providers;⁴² this number includes credit recovery and alternative education students.

The state has three fully online charter schools: Oklahoma Virtual Charter Academy served 2,782 enrollments,⁴³ Epic One Charter School served 2,241 enrollments in school year 2012-13, and Oklahoma Connections Academy (run by Connections Academy) served 510 enrollments in school year 2012-13. There are also two fully online non-charter schools: Oklahoma Virtual High School (run by Advanced Academics), which reported 765 students, and Oklahoma Connections Academy (run by Connections Academy), which served 510 enrollments in school year 2012-13. Tulsa Public Schools also offers a full-time virtual school to its students. Supplemental online programs include the University of Oklahoma Independent Learning High School and Oklahoma State University K-12 Distance Learning Academy. Full-time online programs are serving 1.11% of the state's K-12 student population.

In June 2012, board rule⁴⁴ created the Oklahoma Supplemental Online Course Program (OSOCP) to establish a framework for school districts to offer supplemental online courses. That rule allows students to take up to five hours of supplemental online instruction at no cost to the student; funding is prorated to the prior year's per pupil expenditure. Under the OSOCP, the board has approved 17 providers and seen an increase in unique students taking an online course. While each school district must adopt its own rules regarding the OSOCP, those rules must not deny a student the opportunity to enroll in supplemental online courses, although the district does have the final say in regard to choosing a provider. While each school district is responsible for paying each course provider, "payment to the provider will be based upon continued course enrollment and subsequent course completion."

Teacher licensure requirements

Teachers holding a full teaching credential in any state are eligible for provisional certification in equivalent subject areas with the possibility of having to take Oklahoma tests. In order to obtain a provisional certification, teachers must submit:

- Application for Oklahoma School Certificate
- Official transcripts from all colleges or universities.
- Proof of Teaching (pdf) form and copy of teaching certificate valid during dates of experience listed, if applicable.
- Copy of all teaching certificates.
- A \$50 processing fee (check, cashier's check, or money order).
- Submit fingerprint cards and a \$59 fee for a criminal history record search.

Once these materials are received, the applicant will be issued a provisional certificate in order to complete the Oklahoma testing requirements (general education, subject area(s), and professional education competency examination). The Oklahoma Commission for Teacher Preparation (OCTP) determines if teacher tests taken in another state are acceptable.

⁴¹ Enrollment numbers are DOE estimates based on self-reported data from schools. In SY 2011-12, it is unclear if the enrollment number included credit recovery.

⁴² Supplemental Online Course Providers; <http://ok.gov/sde/node/3544#List>

⁴³ 2013 K12 Academic Report; <http://www.k12.com/sites/default/files/pdf/2013-K12-Academic-Report-Feb6-2013.pdf>

⁴⁴ State Board rule; <http://ok.gov/sde/sites/ok.gov.sde/files/Rules-Ch15Sub34SuppOnlineCourses.pdf>

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In addition, applicants will also be required to complete one year of successful employment in an Oklahoma accredited school, college, or university. Once all requirements have been met, the candidate will receive a five-year standard license.

Oklahoma is one of 11 states that accept a national certification via the American Board, a state-approved route to full teacher certification.⁴⁵ However, this route is geared toward professionals changing careers, and not current teachers or recent teacher preparation program graduates.

⁴⁵ American Board Teacher Certification, <http://abcte.org/#sthash.EGX1Xf6J.dpuf>

Utah

Utah has a state virtual school (the Utah Electronic High School), four statewide fully online charter schools, and many districts offering online courses via the Statewide Online Education Program (SOEP), which is among the first and best-known course choice programs in the country.

There are four statewide online charter schools in Utah. Utah Virtual Academy served 2,051 K-12 students in school year 2012-13, an annual increase of 3%. Mountain Heights Academy, formally the Open High School of Utah, enrolled 334 students in school year 2012-13, a 2% annual increase. Utah Connections Academy reported 449 enrollments, a 61% increase, and Alianza Academy reported 502 enrollments in school year 2012-13, an increase of 7%. Full-time online programs are serving 0.53% of the state's K-12 student population.

Utah offers high school students choice at the course level through the SOEP.⁴⁶ Students and parents, including homeschooled and private students, can choose online courses and providers to supplement the students' brick-and mortar education. The SOEP providers may serve any student enrolled in any school district or Utah charter school in grades 9-12. The courses offered range from core language arts, math, and science courses to electives such as health, fitness, and financial literacy. Although course choice in Utah has received extensive attention, it is still quite small, serving 1,279 course enrollments and 664 unique students in SY 2012-13. The reasons that the program is small aren't well understood, but the requirement that teachers must be licensed in Utah may be among them.

Any LEA—charter or district—can apply to be an online provider, or can contract with private providers to offer an online program. Course providers may not limit class sizes. Open-entry, open-exit online courses are permitted. Each provider administers state assessments; the state is required to make assessments available upon course completion. The State Board of Education must develop a report on the performance of online course providers that is released each fall.

Teacher licensure requirements

Teachers with out-of-state licenses wishing to teach in Utah must submit an endorsement application form, an evaluation filing fee of \$75, college transcripts, other state licenses, verification of prior teaching experience, PRAXIS II test scores, and verification of application for a background check.⁴⁷

Utah is also one of 11 states that accept a national certification via the American Board, a state-approved route to full teacher certification.⁴⁸ However, this route is geared toward professionals changing careers, and not current teachers or recent teacher preparation program graduates.

⁴⁶ Statewide Online Education Program, <http://schools.utah.gov/edonline/>

⁴⁷ Utah Out-of-State Educator License Application, <http://www.schools.utah.gov/cert/Out-of-State-License.aspx>

⁴⁸ American Board Teacher Certification, <http://abcte.org/#sthash.EGX1Xf6J.dpuf>



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