

ASK THE TEAM

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Tiered Licensure: Connecting Educator Effectiveness Policies

Question From the Field

What promising practices have been identified for creating tiered licensure systems, and are there strategies for linking these systems with a pay structure?

Multitiered licensure structures can provide educators incentives to develop and improve their performance as they work toward advanced status. When working in tandem with compensation, career ladders, and ongoing professional learning policies, licensure can be a lever to promote educator development, advancement, and retention. Licensure requirements also provide districts with an accountability mechanism and help districts determine which teachers and principals should advance within the profession. Ensuring alignment across the multiple policy areas that connect with licensure policies is critical for developing a tiered licensure system that supports a coherent approach to promoting educator effectiveness.

Several states are in the beginning stages of creating a tiered teacher-level licensing structure (e.g., standard, professional, master, or lead levels). We developed this Ask the Team brief to provide states and regional centers with a quick guide to the current development of tiered licensure across the United States. Inside you will find the following:

- Inputs and outputs: What are states requiring for licensure?
- Creating opportunities: multiple tiers, multiple career paths
- Charting new pay scales: aligning tiered systems with compensation

To gather information, we consulted the Council of Chief State School Officers' (CCSSO) Educators in Residence, who work directly with the states. We also drew on an unpublished CCSSO report on teacher certification (Steiner, 2012) and scanned state websites. The states highlighted here have different approaches to tiered licensure, but only one—New Mexico—links directly to teacher compensation.

Tip

What is a tiered licensure system?

A tiered licensure system requires licensees to demonstrate increased teaching efficacy and growth to advance to higher licensure levels.

1. INPUTS AND OUTPUTS

What Are States Requiring for Licensure?

States can look at two different aspects of effective teaching in setting licensure requirements:

- **Inputs:** Input-focused licensure systems typically require completion of a set of activities, such as induction (early in-classroom training, workshops, and mentoring), professional development hours, advanced degrees, or a professional development plan.
- **Outputs:** Performance- or outcome-based licensure requirements emphasize whether the teacher can demonstrate mastery of instructional techniques and generate student growth as the key indicators of effective teaching performance.

Many states are beginning to use both input and output measures to determine licensure. Rhode Island and Maryland requirements for teacher licensing include an induction program (input) *plus* recommendations from supervisors or evaluations informed in part by student growth (outputs).

Typically, states require teacher candidates to pass tests that measure teaching skills, subject matter knowledge, and professional knowledge for initial licensure. Partly in response to the federal Race to the Top initiative, states are trending toward the additional use of performance-based assessments, often aligned with annual evaluation systems, to measure the effectiveness of all teachers—beginning and veteran (Hoogstra, 2011). In combining standards for educator advancement and accountability, input and output measures should be considered together to create one integrated and coherent system (Hoogstra, 2011).

Several states have implemented strategies in an effort to incorporate performance-based measures into license renewal:

- Wisconsin requires that teachers submit a portfolio and videos of their teaching. These items are reviewed by a three-member team prior to advancement. Additional information on this process can be found in the *Tiered Teacher Certification and Performance-Based Assessment*.
- North Carolina requires beginning teachers to complete an induction program and receive a rating of “proficient” on all five North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards on their most recent evaluation before advancing. More information on this process can be found in *Tiered Teacher Certification and Performance-Based Assessment*.
- In order to receive a professional certification or continue to teach in the state, Maryland’s proposed three-tiered performance-based certification system, funded through Race to the Top, requires teachers to be rated “effective” or higher on their evaluation, which includes student achievement and growth (50 percent). New York, Tennessee, and Georgia have planned similar changes linking evaluations to license renewal, and Rhode Island, Delaware, and Louisiana have already adopted performance-based systems (Banchero, 2013; Steiner, 2012).

Food for Thought

“An effective teacher must be able to integrate content knowledge with the specific strengths and needs of students to assure that all students learn and perform at high levels.”

Council of Chief State School Officers (2013)

2. CREATING OPPORTUNITIES

Multiple Tiers, Multiple Career Paths

Many states are aligning teacher licensure standards with measures of teacher effectiveness to create both an accountability mechanism for student growth and a career ladder to encourage and reward great teachers. Tiers identify levels of professional competence and requirements for advancing to higher tiers. A teacher on the “standard” tier can advance to the professional tier. A professional teacher may advance to master or lead teacher. The tiered system offers teachers opportunities for advancement while keeping the most talented teachers in the classroom. Ohio, highlighted in Table 1, has developed a four-tiered system in an effort to identify and retain talented teachers.

DID YOU KNOW?

Ten states use a single certification system.

Twenty-one states use a two-tiered system: initial licensing and professional licensing.

Seventeen states use three or more tiers.

National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification Clearinghouse (2012)

Table 1. State Spotlight: Ohio’s Four-Tiered System*

| Tier | Requirements |
|---|---|
| Resident Educator License (Resident) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Bachelor’s degree (Resident and Alternative) ■ Approved teacher preparation program (Resident) |
| Alternative Resident Educator License (Alternative) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ State licensure exams (Resident) ■ Content area exam (Alternative) ■ Completion of an intensive pedagogical training institute (Alternative) ■ Four year and nonrenewable (Resident and Alternative) |
| Professional Educator License | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Bachelor’s degree ■ Successful completion of Ohio Resident Educator License program ■ Renewable every five years |
| Senior Professional Educator License | <p>Degree requirement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Master’s degree or higher <p>Experience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Nine years under standard teaching license with 120 days of service, at least five years of which are under professional, permanent license, or certificate <p>Demonstration of practice at the Accomplished or Distinguished level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Master Teaching Portfolio Renewable every five years |
| Lead Professional Educator License | <p>Degree requirement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Master’s degree or higher <p>Experience</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Nine years under standard teaching license, at least five years of which are under professional, permanent license, certification or Senior Professional Educator License <p>Demonstration of practice at the Distinguished level</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Earn Teacher Leader Endorsement and successful completion of the Master Teacher Portfolio or ■ Active National Board Certification ■ Renewable every five years |

Source: Ohio Department of Education, 2013.

*This table highlights aspects of Ohio’s licensure system and is not a comprehensive description of the complete licensure structure.

3. CHARTING NEW PAY SCALES

Aligning Tiered Systems With Compensation

Although several states have begun to align licensure with evaluation and professional learning systems better, most states do not explicitly align licensure with compensation structures—pay scales are typically negotiated at the district level. New Mexico has been a pioneer in tying licensure to compensation.

State Spotlight: New Mexico

In 2003, New Mexico took steps to align its three-tiered licensure system with teacher compensation. Each tier is designed with a base salary attached. As teachers move from Provisional to Professional to Master status, they earn greater compensation—and responsibility. To progress through the tiers, a teacher must undergo an in-depth interview process and show proof of increasing competency levels. Licensure advancement is determined by an annual evaluation and the Professional Development Dossier (PPD). The PPD is the cornerstone of New Mexico's three-tiered licensing system and requires teachers to meet performance standards in instruction, student learning, and professional learning (New Mexico Public Education Department, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2012, p. 8–9).

4. CREATING YOUR STATE'S SYSTEM

Tips and Promising Practices

Define Expectations From A to Z. Licensure should support and promote state goals of educator development and improved student learning. The licensure system should include a continuum of performance-based expectations and licensing assessments from novice to veteran teachers.

Create Opportunities. Supports that provide educators with opportunities to learn should be built into the licensure system. These could include comprehensive induction systems and mentoring.

Leverage Relationships. Relationships between preparation providers and candidate placement districts (for clinical practice, residencies, or employment) should be leveraged so that there is follow-through into the early induction years and so that a culture of collegial coaching carries over from preparation into early practice.

Utilize Evaluation Data. Explore how to leverage evaluation data in valid and reliable ways to inform high-stakes licensure decisions as one of multiple measures. These data should also be linked to ongoing professional growth plans that can serve as another source of performance data as well.

Plan for Alignment. Ensure that certification and licensure policies align to the state's strategic vision for improving educator effectiveness. Identify key areas for alignment across related policy areas, such as compensation, career ladders, performance evaluation, and ongoing professional learning policies.

References

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I WANT TO KNOW MORE!

Bonus Resources

Council of Chief State School Officers. (2011, August 9). Tiered licensure and developmental continuums [webinar]. Retrieved from <http://scee.groupsie.com/page/webinars>

Ohio Department of Education. (2010). Race the Top application (section D2). Columbus, OH: Author. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/phase2-applications/ohio.pdf>

For more examples or information on this topic, contact gtlcenter@air.org.

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