

SREB

State Policies to Improve Teacher Preparation

Executive Summary

Every student deserves a good teacher. And every teacher deserves effective preparation to teach their students.

The charge to the SREB Teacher Preparation Commission was to develop recommendations for states to improve the preparation of new classroom teachers. Chaired by Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards, the Commission included state legislators, deans, university presidents, educators, researchers, heads of postsecondary systems, state and district superintendents, and leaders of nationwide organizations.

As they came together to confront one of education's most challenging issues, members of the Commission stressed that although there are no easy answers, action has never been more important. They acknowledged the importance of related matters — teacher pay, for example, and ongoing professional development and respect for the profession — while keeping their focus on the preparation of new teachers. They debated how to raise standards for teachers without aggravating teacher shortages when some schools are hard-pressed to attract effective teachers.

In the end, Commission members agreed that filling vacancies with people who cannot help students learn is not a solution. They recommended expanding promising practices — practice-based licensure exams, high-quality clinical experiences, data systems and local partnerships — and collecting evidence to validate and improve them. And they acted to raise expectations while allowing time to meet them.

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Recommendations

How each state addresses the recommendations of the SREB Teacher Preparation Commission will depend on who leads the effort and what agencies are responsible for standards, approvals and licensure — which varies by state. If these roles are disconnected, state leaders should work toward aligning them into a coherent system for teachers. A durable plan to transform educator preparation will connect all the actors to focus on one outcome: a competent teacher in every classroom.

Licensure — Hold all new teachers to the same standard, no matter their route into the profession.

1. Require all teacher candidates in a state to meet the same high criteria for initial licensure, whether their preparation is traditional or alternative, undergraduate, post-baccalaureate or graduate.
State licensing agencies and boards should require all teachers to meet well-defined requirements, within one year of becoming a teacher, to earn their initial licenses. A phase-in period should allow all preparation programs time to adjust so their graduates can meet the common initial standard.
2. Adopt practice-based assessments of teacher readiness.
State licensing agencies should require practice-based assessments that reflect the work teachers do in classrooms, with a phase-in period to allow preparation programs time to adjust.
3. Identify a continuum of teacher development and link it to the licensure system.
 - State licensure requirements should align with state standards for teacher evaluation and development.
 - States should develop tiered professional licensure systems and aligned licensure exams that delineate what skilled performance looks like across a teacher's career.
 - States should explore induction, mentoring and professional learning programs for the first three years of a teacher's career and align them with tiered licensure and exams.

Clinical Experiences — Place all teacher candidates in high-quality clinical experiences.

1. Require programs to place candidates in high-quality clinical experiences.
Program approval standards should require teacher preparation programs to clearly communicate what quality teaching looks like and to place teacher candidates with strong mentor-teachers.
2. Provide mentor-teachers support and training, with specific strategies for giving good feedback.
3. Prioritize any available stipend funding for residencies for candidates who intend to teach in low-performing or hard-to-staff schools.
4. Require programs to report on the quality of clinical experiences.

Data Systems — Bring together data from across state and local agencies to inform improvement.

1. Implement a statewide data system that synthesizes information on teacher development from various state and local education agencies. Include, for example: admission and course requirements, demographics, and teacher placement, effectiveness and retention.
2. Disseminate the data widely, tailored to the needs of specific audiences.
3. Empower change and expect improvement.
 - States should ensure that preparation programs are using data to inform decisions about content and structure.
 - Preparation programs, state education departments and licensing agencies should work together to design accountability that focuses on improvement and outcomes and holds preparation programs responsible for their graduates' performance as teachers.

Partnerships — Encourage strong partnerships between teacher preparation programs and local school districts.

1. Provide incentives and support for partnerships, such as grants or regional convenings.