

# A Review of State Teacher Licensure Strategies

## Implications for Policymakers

### Context

State policymakers develop licensure requirements for two reasons: to set minimum standards for teacher readiness and to ensure that incoming teachers complete similar preparation experiences. SREB states require licensure applicants to complete a preparation program, participate in a clinical experience, and pass certain content and pedagogy assessments.

Increasingly, states have redesigned strategies to address requirements for candidates entering the profession through alternative pathways. Some states have also responded to district staffing shortages by relaxing rules for provisional and emergency licensure.

SREB reviewed licensure policies to inform state leaders about current trends. This document concludes with three observations by SREB staff after conducting the review and four questions for policymakers considering changes to their states' preparation and licensure requirements.

### Key Takeaways

*General licensure requirements do not vary significantly across the region and nation.*

Regardless of pathway, all SREB states require individuals applying for initial licenses to show that they have earned a baccalaureate degree, passed relevant licensure assessments and completed relevant clinical experiences or professional learning.

*State leaders have revised strategies, partly responding to growth of the alternative sector.*

In recent years, state legislatures and state boards of education have pursued changes in the way they regulate alternative pathways. Some of these policy shifts relate to broadening alternative approaches while others refine program, districts, and candidate requirements.

*Half of SREB states now require teacher candidates in university programs to pass practice-based assessments.*

Performance assessments like edTPA or the Praxis Performance Assessment for Teachers evaluate teacher candidates' ability to plan and implement lessons. For both assessments, candidates produce a portfolio that includes lesson plans, examples of student work, and self-reflections. The testing companies hire trained professionals to score both the portfolios and a videotaped lesson.

*This brief was written by SREB Research Associate Matthew Smith, adapted from research for SREB Education Human Capital Roundtables.*

## State Licensure Requirements

### Licensure Assessments

Twelve of 16 SREB states require prospective teachers to produce passing scores on relevant examinations in the Praxis suite. ETS administers tests in three areas:

- Foundational knowledge — **Praxis Core Academic Skills for Educators**, formerly Praxis I, assesses basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics. ETS allows individuals to take separate subject tests or a combined assessment.
- Specific content or pedagogical knowledge — **Praxis Subject Assessments**, formerly Praxis II, measure teaching skills and knowledge in specific subjects. ETS also offers Principles of Learning and Teaching tests across four grade spans.
- General pedagogical knowledge — **Praxis Performance Assessment for Teachers**, formerly Praxis III, requires individuals to respond to four prompts and to submit evidence that support their answers. For one of the four tasks, test-takers must upload a video.

Florida, Georgia, Oklahoma and Texas have adopted state-specific assessments. The Georgia Professional Standards Commission developed the Georgia Assessment for the Certification of Educators in consultation with ETS. Pearson collaborated with state agencies in Florida, Oklahoma and Texas to produce licensure assessments.

Pearson administers the edTPA, a performance-based assessment developed by faculty at Stanford University. Individuals complete a portfolio of artifacts created and collected during candidates' clinical experience. Seven SREB states have endorsed the use of edTPA as a state-approved performance assessment: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee.

Regardless of the assessment vendor, state licensing agencies set cut scores for core knowledge tests and subject assessments. State regulations vary on which subject-area assessments are required for specific certificates or endorsements. For example, one state might require applicants to present passing scores on the Middle School Content Knowledge and Middle

#### Offering Alternatives to State Licensure Assessments

[Wisconsin licensure rules](#) allow teacher candidates to demonstrate content knowledge in one of three ways.

Option 1: Candidates take and pass relevant Praxis Subject-Area Assessments. In addition, educators applying for elementary and special education certification must pass the Wisconsin Foundations of Reading Test.

Option 2: Candidates complete content-area courses with a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher.

Option 3: Candidates submit a content portfolio. Preparation programs define the portfolio requirements and rate candidates' demonstrated competency level.

While candidates could use options 2 and 3 to opt out of state-required content assessments, all aspiring teachers must pass the state-approved performance assessment, edTPA, to receive professional licenses.

School Science exams; other states might require just the Middle School Science test.

In terms of foundational knowledge tests, most state licensing agencies allow teaching candidates to present scores on other tests (ACT, SAT, GRE) to prevent having to take the Praxis Core or a state-specific general knowledge test.

## Clinical Experiences

Eleven SREB states require candidates in university preparation programs to complete a student teaching experience or classroom internship lasting at least 12 weeks. Seven of the 11 states specify a minimum number of clinical weeks, days or hours. Alabama, Georgia and Tennessee rules require completion of a full-semester experience but do not reference time requirements.

### Louisiana's Residency Model

Starting in July 2018, all candidates enrolled in university preparation programs must complete a yearlong residency. The state department piloted the residency strategy for two years before the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adopted the model in October 2016.

Board regulation creates a resident license, describes specific requirements for preparation programs and school districts, and details criteria to assess quality of clinical experiences. Residencies are one part of the broader redesign of educator preparation strategies. The board also created a [competency-based program model](#) and approved a new program quality rating system. The board gave preparation programs until July 2018 to adapt to new state requirements.

Another four SREB states — Arkansas, Delaware, Florida and Maryland — require student teaching or classroom internships but regulations do not reference specific time lengths.

Only Louisiana requires a yearlong residency. However, Georgia regulations and North Carolina state law recommend that university preparation programs adopt yearlong residencies.

Eight SREB states define clinical requirements for candidates enrolled in alternative pathways. Four of the states require one year of full-time teaching experience, while three others — Louisiana, Oklahoma and Tennessee — reference a supervised, job-embedded experience. Delaware allows alternative candidates three options: one year of teaching experience,

enrollment in an alternative program, or the completion of a special institute.

## Alternative Pathways and Routes

### Balancing Two Interests

State policymakers have endorsed state alternative pathways and national models partly in response to teacher shortages. At the same time, data collected by state departments of education suggest that candidates entering the teaching profession through alternative means leave the classroom at greater rates than their peers graduating from university preparation programs. While state policymakers could set more rigorous expectations for alternative providers, a more efficient way to regulate teacher education programs is to heed the SREB

Teacher Preparation Commission’s recommendation: Hold all new teachers to the same standard, no matter their route to the profession.

## State Examples

While all SREB states approve providers to implement alternative licensure programs, state strategies for approving nontraditional pathways and routes vary. Six SREB states — Arkansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, Oklahoma, South Carolina and Virginia — have approved more than five alternative routes to the profession. Georgia, North Carolina and Texas have created a single alternative pathway. Georgia and Texas allow several entities to provide alternative programming, including districts, charter school networks, regional education service agencies and postsecondary institutions.

Generally, state policymakers might develop or endorse licensure routes to:

- Create state-specific licensure pathways such as the Georgia Teacher Academy for Preparation and Pedagogy or the South Carolina Program of Alternative Certification for Educators
- Support individuals who want to pursue an advanced degree in teaching but have no pedagogical training (Master of Arts in Teaching and university-based alternative programs)
- Serve specific groups (career switchers, military veterans, college faculty, teacher paraprofessionals)
- Partner with national providers like Teach for America, Teachers of Tomorrow or the American Board for the Certification of Teacher Excellence
- Allow school districts and charter schools to deliver programming to teachers with provisional licenses

### District Certification Programs

Florida, Kentucky, Maryland, South Carolina, Texas and West Virginia allow school districts to deliver alternative programming. In most cases, state licensing agencies require districts to work with a partner. For instance, Greenville County Schools works with the South Carolina Department of Education and Public Education Partners to deliver specialized professional learning during the school year and over the summer.

As with other alternative routes, program length varies by district decision and state requirements. Candidates enrolled in the Greenville model complete three years of classroom experience before applying for a renewable professional license. In other states, completers may apply for initial licensure after finishing a one-year program. Regardless of program length, these strategies could allow administrators to prepare candidates for the norms and practices prioritized by districts.

## SREB Observations

1. States could benefit from considering non-test measures when awarding initial licenses.

While licensure exams set a minimum-quality benchmark for incoming teachers, tests alone are weak indicators of future teacher effectiveness. Practice-based assessments like edTPA could serve as a better indicator than subject-area exams, but state policymakers should consider a multiple-measures approach that provides more assurances that program completers are prepared for the classroom.

2. On the educator preparation side, policymakers could adopt strategies that require candidates to demonstrate mastery on certain standards.

Louisiana rules direct providers to implement competency-based teacher education curricula and provide yearlong residencies for candidates. While most SREB states require programs to cover certain topics, policymakers could identify a small set of standards that they want completers to master before entering the classroom. Preparation program leaders could embed these standards into courses and field and clinical experiences.

3. State licensing agencies could require teachers with initial licenses to demonstrate mastery on priority standards before receiving a renewable professional license.

States could issue provisional licenses to all teachers entering the classroom, regardless of their preparation route. Doing so would send a strong signal that teachers' mastery matters more than their pathway.

## Four Questions for State Policymakers

1. What are the specific skills and competencies that candidates in your state should demonstrate to show they are ready to teach?
2. Do the Praxis and edTPA assess these skills and competencies? What other licensure criteria could your state use?
  - How could your state assess candidates' mastery of certain priority standards and competencies?
  - How could programs use field and clinical experiences as an opportunity for candidates to demonstrate competence on standards?
3. How will state strategies address teacher shortages while maintaining some assurance that programs adequately prepare teachers?
4. What roles (policy advice, technical assistance, strategic messaging) could state leaders play in supporting the implementation of licensure models?