

Washington Update October 20, 2017

Dear Colleagues:

This is a special issue of Washington Update on the theme of **Entrance to the Profession: Innovation or Lowering Standards?** Let me know what is happening in your state!

Entrance to the Profession: Innovation or Lowering Standards?

In the last few weeks, I have increasingly encountered news of states “reforming” entry paths to become a teacher, generally motivated by addressing critical teacher shortages, with special education at the forefront. I put “reforming” in quotes because I am not quite sure of the implication.

- Does it mean creating new options that attract career-changers with different standards because that makes sense for people from other careers?
- Does it mean new strategies to reach out to diverse audiences and eliminate unintended barriers?
- Does it mean early recruitment in high schools?
- Does it mean giving credit for life experiences that substitute for formal teacher preparation? If so, what would those life experiences be, for example for special education?
- Does it mean eliminating barriers that are simply bureaucratic hurdles, particularly in relation to initial state certification?
- Does it mean strengthening clinical preparation and induction to address both teacher readiness on day one and teacher turnover in the early years?
- Does it mean treating teaching like an apprenticeship where you learn on the job?
- Does it mean simply lowering the bar?
- Does it mean trying anything that is new and different since the shortages are so pressing leaving states, superintendents and principals desperate to find alternatives for substitute teachers?
- Or is it all of the above?
- Is it clear that the “reforms” underway by states are in compliance with federal law?

I don't have the answers, but I think the questions are important. Some policy context is offered below and some examples of some state “reforms” in process.

Federal Policy Context – NCLB and ESSA

With the enactment of the Every Student Succeeds Act in 2015 came the elimination of the 13 year old federal requirement for teachers to be “highly qualified” that was part of No Child Left Behind. While that requirement was controversial, and reinterpreted through amendments a number of times, it did require that teachers meet a sufficient level of content knowledge, hold at least a BA and have full state certification. In addition, it codified alternate routes to teaching allowing participants to serve as the teacher of record for up to three years so long as they were

enrolled in a preparation program leading to full certification and receiving ongoing high-quality professional development and supervision. With these federal requirements removed, all decision making about determining readiness to enter the profession rests with the state. There is no longer a federal floor for content knowledge, nor a federal requirement for those pursuing alternate routes to be enrolled in programs that lead to full certification or receive ongoing professional development and supervision. The “highly qualified” provision was replaced by state authority to determine the credentials of teachers. Certification is the portal for entry and this is where many states are experimenting with new provisions.

See: <https://www.nea.org/assets/docs/Backgrounder-HighlyQualifiedTeachers.pdf>

Federal Policy Context – IDEA

When ESSA was enacted and it eliminated the “highly qualified” provision, it also amended IDEA to eliminate the term “highly qualified;” however, the new provisions in IDEA which define requirements for special education teachers are not the same as those in ESSA. For one, in IDEA special education teachers must have a BA. No such requirement exists in ESSA. In addition, special education teachers must have:

- Obtained full state certification as a special education teacher – including participation in alternate routes, as defined under NCLB, or
- Passed the state special education teacher licensing exam and
- Hold a license to teach in the state as a special education teacher.

Thus when a special education teacher enters the classroom through an alternate route, the previous requirements of NCLB apply, in particular the teacher must be receiving high-quality professional development, intensive supervision, assume the functions of a teacher for no more than 3 years and be progressing toward full certification.

In addition, IDEA references “qualified personnel” a number of times. How these new provisions interact with that concept, is a consideration for further analysis.

See: <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CFR-2009-title34-vol1/pdf/CFR-2009-title34-vol1-sec200-56.pdf>

See: <http://www.apta.org/FederalIssues/ESSA/>

Teacher Shortages

Teacher shortages across the country have been growing over the last few years. The Learning Policy Institute has researched shortages and their causes extensively and notes the following:

- In 2015-16 there was a national teacher shortage of about 60,000
- Special education is the field with the greatest shortage with 48 states and DC reporting shortages; STEM fields and foreign languages also experience significant shortages
- 90% of high poverty schools have experienced a teacher shortage
- If current trends continue, the shortage could rise to 112,000 by 2018
- Teacher preparation program enrollment is down 35% nationally in the last 5 years
- Teacher replacement costs, fueled by teacher turnover and shortages, is approximately \$8 billion per year
- Teachers of color leave schools and the teaching profession at a rate higher than white teachers – 18.9% for teachers of color and 15% for white teachers
- Those prepared through alternate pathways with less coursework and student teaching are 25% more likely to leave their schools and the profession than those who are well prepared
- Reasons for teachers leaving include poor compensation, lack of administrative support, dissatisfaction with working conditions, dissatisfaction with testing and accountability pressures and lack of opportunities for advancement
- Some states and geographic regions have more extensive shortages than others

See: https://www.scribd.com/document/324144856/A-Coming-Crisis-in-Teaching-Learning-Policy-Institute#from_embed

For a list of state by state shortage areas see:
<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/pol/tsa.pdf>

Examples of Certification “Reform” from States

Alabama

An Alabama State School Board resolution allows districts to hire adjunct teachers – people who are not certified – to work up to half time. Details of the provision include:

- Adjuncts must have a high school diploma or equivalent
- Adjuncts must have a clean background check
- Adjuncts may not teach early childhood, elementary or special education (thus they may teach academic subjects and in career and technical areas)
- Adjuncts must work under the guidance of a mentor
- Adjuncts are not required to seek certification unless they want to work more than half time
- There is no limit on the number of adjuncts a district may hire

http://www.dothaneagle.com/news/education/new-adjunct-policy-allows-hiring-of-non-certified-teachers-in/article_d2c71338-c54a-11e5-9216-2f00e113af6b.html

Connecticut

The Connecticut State Board of Education is considering pairing back certification requirements and creating new alternate pathways. Areas of focus are bilingual, math, science and special education.

<https://ctmirror.org/2017/08/08/facing-teacher-shortages-state-to-propose-certification-overhaul/>

Minnesota

Responding to an audit that described the current certification system as broken, Minnesota has adopted a new four tier certification system which will take effect next summer. A key feature related to the shortages below:

- Tier 1: teachers obtain a one year license with a four year degree in any subject or, if they are teaching in a technical field, a two year degree and professional certification or work experience. The school district must vouch for the teacher's skills and show that they cannot find a more qualified candidate. These one year licenses may be renewed indefinitely in technical fields and shortage areas.

<https://www.mprnews.org/story/2017/06/14/new-rules-to-make-teacher-requirements-more-flexible>

New York

- New York City charter schools which operate under the auspices of SUNY may now certify their own teachers
- Prospective teachers in these charter schools must fulfill just over a week of practice teaching
- Prospective special education teachers need to fulfill a week of "observing and working with" students with disabilities as well as 10 hours of discipline training and a week of general field experience
- Teaching candidates do not have to be trained by certified teachers
- The teachers' union just filed suit to prevent this initiative from moving forward

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/11/nyregion/suny-charter-schools-teacher-training.html>

https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/12/nyregion/unions-sue-to-block-watered-down-rules-for-charter-teacher-training.html?emc=edit_tnt_20171012&nid=40766138&tntemail0=y

Utah

In response to the teacher shortage:

- People may be licensed to teach with no preparation in teaching, rather a BA degree and passage of a test

<http://archive.sltrib.com/article.php?id=4227197&itype=CMSID>

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2016/08/15/in-utah-schools-can-now-hire-teachers-with-no-training-whatsoever/?utm_term=.40737e1973f6

West Virginia

West Virginia has proposed changes to reduce some licensing requirements, in part to address shortages. The proposal was out for public comment which ended October 10 and final action is pending. The proposal includes:

- Clarifications regarding requirements for receiving permanent teaching certification with an MA and the coursework required
- Exemptions from the PRAXIS pre-Professional Skills Test for people with five years of directly related work experience and an MA in the content area for which the license is sought
- Exemptions from the PRAXIS Pre-professional skills test for people with a BA and an overall GPA of 3.5

<http://wvmetronews.com/2017/09/12/state-boe-considering-changes-to-some-teacher-licensing-requirements>

Wisconsin

Also in response to the shortage, Wisconsin has slipped a provision into its state budget proposal that would fund the American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence (ABCTE) as an alternative route option. Superintendent of Education Evers is opposed to the provision. ABCTE is a low-cost online fast track program for those who have a Bachelor's degree. ABCTE is controversial and has been challenged as lacking in efficacy.

<http://www.jsonline.com/story/news/education/2017/09/09/wisconsin-budget-proposal-would-exempt-some-teacheopen-door-controversial-online-teacher-prep-progra/642742001/>

In my next look at this issue I'll highlight some promising and innovative practices to strengthen the profession, address shortages and expand diversity in the profession simultaneously.

I look forward to hearing from you! Let me know what is happening in your state!

In the meantime see you on twitter @janewestdc

Best,

Jane

