

## EDUCATION WEEK

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### Feds Order Tests for Some Rookie Texas Teachers

By [The Associated Press](#)

Austin, Texas

Several thousand first-year elementary school teachers in Texas will have to take exams as early as this spring, the U.S. Department of Education has ordered, rejecting an appeal from the state to waive the requirement.

In a letter to state Education Commissioner Robert Scott this week, the federal agency said first-year teachers in elementary and some middle schools who didn't pass a "generalist" exam measuring knowledge in core subjects are not in compliance with federal standards and must be tested. Texas has a week to come up with a testing plan.

However, federal officials did exempt teachers who specialize in music, art and similar courses from the generalist exam. That waiver may cover thousands of first-year fine-arts teachers.

Debbie Ratcliffe, a spokeswoman for the Texas Education Agency, said there is no estimate yet on how many teachers will have to take the exam. Before the waiver for fine arts teachers was granted, state officials said as many as 30,000 new teachers hired in the current school year might have to take the exam.

Texas schools typically hire about 45,000 new teachers each year.

"We're pleased with the ruling because we didn't think we would win on any front," Ratcliffe said Friday. "We're glad they recognized the special circumstances of fine arts teachers."

Teachers hired before the current school year were already exempted from the testing requirement, which is meant to ensure that teachers are "highly qualified."

Most new teachers passed only a certification exam in a specific subject, which the state backed by the Bush administration at the time said was sufficient to be licensed as a teacher. Teachers also must pass a separate pedagogy and professional responsibilities exam.

But an Oct. 19 monitoring report from the education department said the state is in violation of federal law and must submit a timeline and plan to implement the requirement that those teachers pass a multi-subject exam.

State education officials have been directed to submit a plan to test the teachers and come in compliance with federal law by Jan. 15.

Secondary school teachers are generally unaffected by the federal action, since they tend to teach in just one subject. Most elementary school teachers, though, educate students in multiple subjects.

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