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# Report: State teacher evaluations need overhaul

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Enlarge By Colin Archer, AP

Special education teacher Karen Hansen works with students at Long Branch Middle School in Long Branch, N.J. Test scores for students with disabilities, immigrants, poor children and minorities must be separated out under the No Child Left Behind law. But if one group fails to hit testing benchmarks at a school -- like last year at Long Branch -- the whole school gets a failing grade. New Jersey reviews teachers annually and puts new teachers on a three-year probationary period.

## TEACHER POLICIES VARY

Fourteen states require teachers to have annual evaluations: Arizona, Arkansas, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Washington and Wyoming.

States vary in how quickly they give public school teachers job security after a probationary period:

- After one year: North Dakota.
- After two years: California, Maine, Maryland, Mississippi, Nevada, Vermont and Washington.
- After three years: Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, West Virginia and Wyoming.
- After four years: Connecticut, Illinois, Michigan and North Carolina.
- After five years: Indiana and Missouri.
- There is no state policy regarding tenure in Wisconsin or in the District of Columbia.

Source: National Council on Teacher Quality

WASHINGTON (AP) — A new public school teacher in North Dakota works for a year on probation before getting job security. For a teacher in Missouri, it's five years.

It's just one example of how policies affecting the teaching profession vary from state to state, according to a report by the National Council on Teacher Quality, a private group in Washington.

Just as the federal No Child Left Behind education law is being rewritten on Capitol Hill, state laws nationwide need reworking, the non-partisan group says.

"For the most part the current system is a mix of broken, counterproductive and anachronistic policies in need of an overhaul," says the report, which summarizes each state's laws and regulations affecting teachers. The report is scheduled for release Wednesday.

The group found differences in how teachers are evaluated, prepared, licensed and compensated — all factors that affect teaching quality.

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Kate Walsh, president of the National Council on Teacher Quality, said the variation in policies makes little sense, but she stopped short of calling for national standards for teachers.

"I've seen some states do some good things that I know wouldn't happen if they were all in the same room trying to do it," Walsh said.

One example of how states differ from each other, and the labor market more broadly, involves teacher evaluations.

While annual reviews may be a fact of life in many businesses, only about a quarter of states require annual evaluations for teachers, according to the report. Hawaii, Missouri and Tennessee let teachers go as long as five years without a formal review, the report says.

And only about half the states require reviews to include a classroom observation.

Richard Ingersoll, a professor of education and sociology at the University of Pennsylvania, says that's unwise. "Evaluations are important. These are employees that are working with our children," he said.

But Massachusetts Commissioner of Education David Driscoll said states are reluctant to create too many requirements in this area. In large schools, he said, principals may not have time to review every teacher annually.

The majority of teachers go through undergraduate education programs at colleges or universities. But states, which approve these schools, set weak standards for them, according to the report.

For example, it finds that only nine states — California, Connecticut, Illinois, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, Texas and Washington — require aspiring elementary-school teachers to take an introductory American history class while in education school.

"You want to make sure the teacher knows something about the American Revolution and the Civil War," Walsh said.

The report finds many states are making it difficult for people who did not graduate from education schools to become teachers. Barriers include requiring large amounts of coursework and only allowing colleges, not other non-profits or school districts, to run teacher preparation programs, the report says.

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"It's OK to put up criteria of quality and rigor," Driscoll said, adding that state hoops that aren't important." The report gives Massachusetts good marks for bringing people with different backgrounds into teaching.

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Similarly, veteran teachers should be able to move easily between states by taking licensing tests showing they meet the new state's standards, the report says. Instead, newcomers are more likely to have to take additional course work, which can be expensive and time consuming. [Add more detail to your searches. Click here](#)

Veteran music teacher Neil Manzenberger knows all about that.

He recently moved to Cornville, Ariz., after teaching music in public schools in Indiana for three decades. The plan was to retire, Manzenberger says, but he couldn't resist the lure of the classroom. "When the school buses started rolling in August, I said, 'Man I miss those kids.'"

When he sought a teaching position, Manzenberger said he was stopped by an Arizona requirement that he take a course on the methods of teaching elementary-school music. While Manzenberger hadn't taken that course as a student, he actually taught it for several years at an Indiana University satellite campus.

After an eight-month dispute, during which Manzenberger said he couldn't even find the required course nearby, he finally got a waiver to teach.

"It was ludicrous," he says. "It was just absolutely the dumbest thing I've ever dealt with."

Even as states are erecting barriers that could prevent qualified people from teaching, they also are making it too easy for unqualified people to get in, the report says.

For example, the authors say states are letting novice teachers into classrooms before they have passed state licensing tests.

Just three states — New Jersey, New Mexico and New York — require new teachers to pass such tests before entering the classroom. Many states give teachers one year to pass, but 20 states let people teach for three years or more without passing, the report says.

"Licensing tests serve a critical purpose," says the report. "They provide the public with assurance that a person meets the minimal qualifications to be a teacher."

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ronballew wrote: 52d ago

Most employee evaluation methods don't work. We get annual employee evaluations in the Federal Government, but they are useless. Eighty-five percent of employees get a top rating of "1". This means the average rating is a "1". Anyone who is below the top rating will not be promoted or retained during a reduction in force.

There is no way to recognize outstanding employees because everyone is rated at the average of "1". The ratings might as well be "Pass" or "Fail".

Teachers already get a "Pass" or "Fail" rating; if they fail they are fired; if they are not fired, they passed.

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The Mick wrote: 52d ago

Teacher's in some locations are paid so poorly, with poor health plans and conditions, especially if they teach in inner cities, that the states are going to the expense of recruiting in other countries and bringing in foreign teachers because no one here will teach in those districts.

On the other hand, other locations pay extremely well, with nice pensions and excellent health insurance for life. When I met fellow teachers from a low paying area and talked about retiring early they said, "You can do that. You teach in Maryland. We won't be able to."

If conditions are that varied should there be a national standard? Some places won't get enough teachers. And, by the way, my last teacher rating before retirement was "1" for every category except one of thirty-six: and that category was rated "not applicable".

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avcrm wrote: 53d ago

I think it says alot about our society that a story about a man eating hot dogs gets 31 comments and a story about our teachers gets none. Our priorities are completely skewed.

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