

Improving Teacher Preparation: National Summary

2012 State Teacher Policy Yearbook



There is a tremendous focus across the states these days on building a better teacher workforce. The National Council on Teacher Quality's 2011 *State Teacher Policy Yearbook* chronicled the great progress states are making on adopting new teacher evaluation systems that factor student performance and classroom effectiveness into decisions about compensation, professional development, tenure and dismissal – all in the name of teacher effectiveness.¹

One of the strange ironies of education reformers' attention to teacher effectiveness, however, has been the relative lack of attention to how teacher candidates are prepared to be effective in the job in the first place.

In this 2012 *State Teacher Policy Yearbook*, NCTQ explores the question: **What are states doing to ensure that they are systematically preparing classroom-ready new teachers?**

1. For the most recent comprehensive analysis of state teacher effectiveness policies see NCTQ, *State of the States 2012: Teacher Effectiveness Policies* at: http://www.nctq.org/p/publications/docs/Updated_NCTQ_State%20of%20the%20States%202012_Teacher%20Effectiveness%20Policies.pdf. See also NCTQ's *Making Effectiveness Matter* for the latest data on state policies that require use of teacher effectiveness data for professional development, dismissal and layoff decisions at: http://www.nctq.org/p/publications/docs/YearbookBrief_Area5.pdf.

The big takeaway from this, NCTQ's 2012 annual *Yearbook*: While many states are investing tremendous time and resources into doing a better job identifying effective teachers and providing assistance to ineffective teachers already in the classroom, most states are neglecting opportunities to get it right from the start by setting rigorous standards and high expectations for what teachers should know and should be able to do before they are licensed to become teachers.

The nation's higher education teacher preparation institutions produce the lion's share of the novice teachers who are hired by school districts across the United States each year. States have a great deal of leverage for determining the quality of the standards and training experiences that apply to future teachers. And while there is no question that teacher preparation programs produce some superstar graduates – talented individuals who will excel in the classroom by any state or district's definition of teacher effectiveness – there is much policymakers can do to help ensure that teacher preparation programs in their states are systematically preparing classroom-ready new teachers.

This year NCTQ has put a spotlight on the state rules and regulations guiding teacher preparation and licensing. In addition to exploring the policy landscape in each state, we map out the specific locus of authority in each state for approving teacher education programs, adopting standards and admission criteria for teacher preparation and setting teacher certification rules. *Improving Teacher Preparation*, NCTQ's 2012 *State Teacher Policy Yearbook*, provides tailored, state-specific reports and recommendations for the 50 states and the District of Columbia on:

- Establishing high standards for admission into teacher preparation programs;
- Ensuring that teacher candidates have rigorous content knowledge of the subjects they will teach;
- Providing candidates with high-quality clinical experiences;
- Holding teacher preparation institutions accountable for the quality of teachers they produce; and,
- Setting a flexible yet rigorous and supportive policy environment within which qualified candidates can enter teaching through alternate routes.

Figure A

Delivering well-prepared teachers

	2012 Grade	2011 Grade	Admission into Teacher Preparation Programs	Elementary Teacher Preparation	Middle School Teacher Preparation	Secondary Teacher Preparation	Special Education Teacher Preparation	Student Teaching	Teacher Preparation Program Accountability
Alabama	B-	C	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Florida	B-	B-	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Indiana	B-	C+	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Tennessee	B-	B-	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Connecticut	C+	C-	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Kentucky	C+	C-	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Massachusetts	C+	C+	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Minnesota	C+	C	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Texas	C+	C+	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Arkansas	C	C	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Georgia	C	C	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Louisiana	C	C	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Mississippi	C	C	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Oklahoma	C	C	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Pennsylvania	C	C	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Rhode Island	C	D+	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
New Hampshire	C-	D	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
New Jersey	C-	D+	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
New York	C-	D+	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Ohio	C-	D+	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
South Carolina	C-	C-	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Vermont	C-	D+	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Virginia	C-	C-	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
West Virginia	C-	C-	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Kansas	D+	D+	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Maine	D+	D	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Maryland	D+	D+	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Michigan	D+	D+	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Missouri	D+	D+	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
New Mexico	D+	D+	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Washington	D+	D+	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Wisconsin	D+	D	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
California	D	D	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Colorado	D	D-	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
District of Columbia	D	D	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Hawaii	D	D	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Idaho	D	D	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Illinois	D	D	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Iowa	D	D	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
North Dakota	D	D	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
South Dakota	D	D	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Utah	D	D	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Arizona	D-	D-	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Delaware	D-	D-	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Nebraska	D-	D-	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Nevada	D-	D-	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
North Carolina	D-	D-	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Oregon	D-	D-	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Alaska	F	F	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Montana	F	F	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Wyoming	F	F	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Average State Grade	D+	D							



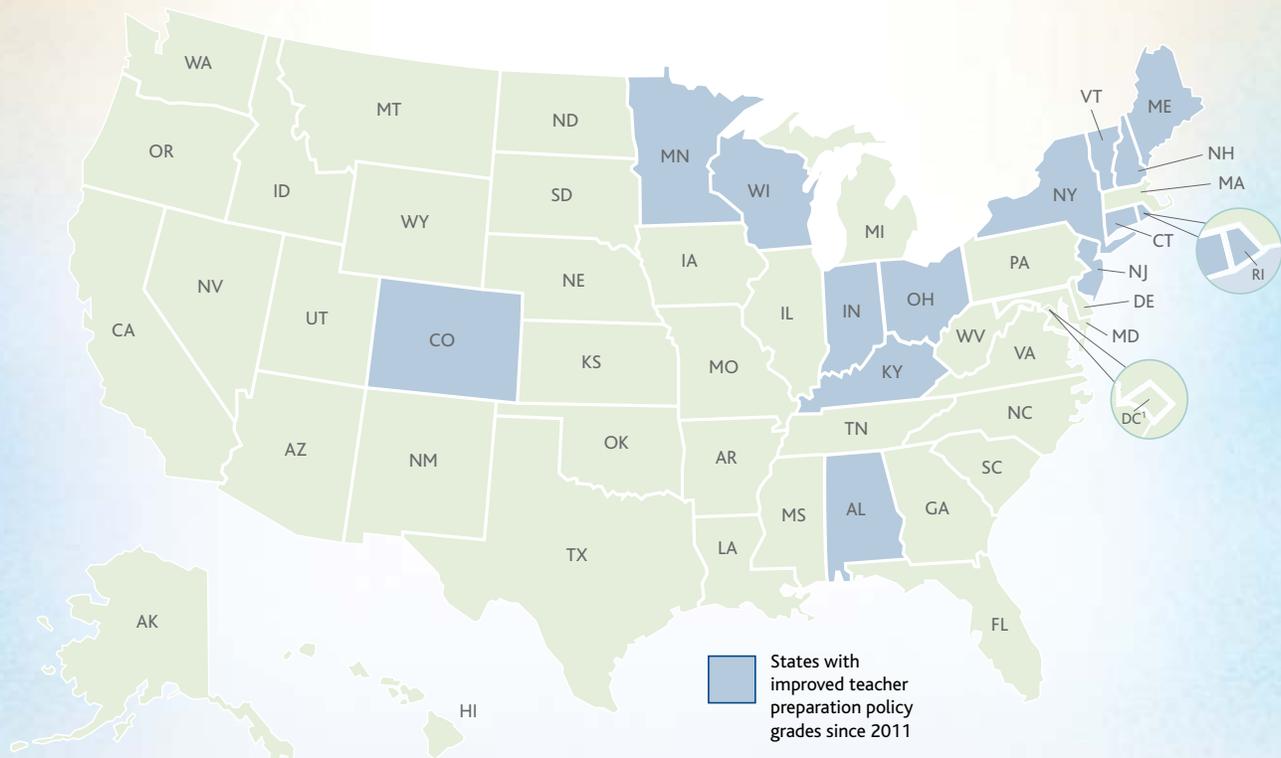
To help prioritize the teacher preparation policies in need of critical attention, in each policy area states receive a "green light" for teacher preparation policies that are on track, a "yellow light" for policies in need of improvement and a "red light" for teacher preparation policies that are far off the mark when it comes to fostering teacher effectiveness out of the gate.

Key Findings

Overall, states are not doing enough to ensure that teachers are prepared to be effective in the classroom. The 50 states and the District of Columbia averaged a meager D+ on teacher preparation policies in 2012, just slightly up from a barely passing grade of D in 2011.

Figure B

States with improved teacher preparation policy grades since 2011



While the national average grade is low and the uptick in the overall policy landscape is small, there is no question that teacher preparation is increasingly on the radar for some state policymakers.

Fourteen states improved their grades in this area in just one year, with improvements in a handful of key policies. For example, in 2007 NCTQ identified just four states that required an adequate assessment of the science of reading as part of teacher licensing; in 2012, ten states require such a test. Eleven states now specifically measure elementary teacher candidates' knowledge of mathematics; in prior years only **Massachusetts** had an adequate content test in math. In 2007, when NCTQ started tracking state policy, no state held teacher preparation programs accountable for the graduates they produce; in 2012, eight states connect student achievement data to preparation programs.

In an otherwise relatively dismal policy landscape, a few states – **Alabama, Florida, Indiana** and **Tennessee** –are noteworthy in that they have earned the highest grades in the nation for their efforts to shape the quality of teacher preparation and licensing. Each of these states earned a B- in 2012 for having the most consistent across the board state policy efforts on teacher preparation, from setting admission standards and holding teacher preparation institutions accountable for results to providing teaching candidates with support and ensuring that new teachers can demonstrate that they have the content knowledge they need to lead a classroom.

Among the 14 states with improved teacher preparation grades, a few states have made considerable progress in just the last year. In addition to Alabama, which raised its grade from a C in 2011 to a B- in 2012, **Connecticut, Kentucky, New Hampshire, Rhode Island** and **Vermont** improved their grades after adopting several new promising teacher preparation requirements. Among other things, each of these states now requires that all elementary teachers, as a condition of licensure, pass the Praxis II Elementary Education: Multiple Subjects test, which reports separate subscores in each subject area, helping to ensure that teachers have adequate knowledge in each specific subject area they will teach.

14 states improved teacher preparation grades.

Across the 50 states and the District of Columbia, however, state standards for preparing new teachers are still simply too low:

- Half the states (24) require that basic skills tests be used as a screening mechanism for teacher preparation programs. Shockingly, the rest of the states require these middle school level assessments upon completion of a teacher preparation program or require no assessment at all.
- The tests used for admission to teacher preparation programs by most states are inherently flawed. For example, the tests used by every state except **Texas** are normed only to the prospective teacher population rather than to the general college-bound population. This sets a lower expectation for students entering teacher preparation programs than for other students at colleges and universities.
- Teaching children to read is one of an elementary teacher's most important responsibilities, yet only 10 states appropriately measure new teachers' knowledge of effective reading instruction. Nor are elementary teachers well prepared in mathematics: Only 11 states adequately test new elementary teachers' knowledge of the subject.
- The licensing bar for elementary teachers is set low. Every state except **Massachusetts** (for which NCTQ has data) sets the passing score for elementary teacher licensing tests below the average score for all test takers (50th percentile), and most states set passing rates at an exceedingly low level – generally the 16th percentile or lower – essentially offering a free pass to teach, at least with regard to content knowledge. Massachusetts is the only state in the nation to receive a “green” light for all aspects of its elementary level teacher preparation efforts.
- Fourteen states still offer a generalist K-8 license and five more offer it under some circumstances. This means that individuals with this license are fully certified to teach grades 7 and 8, although their preparation is identical to that of a teacher certified to teach grades 1 and 2.
- Just three states – **Indiana, Minnesota and Tennessee** – require, without any significant loopholes, that all secondary teachers pass a content test in every subject area they want to be licensed to teach. Unfortunately, many of these loopholes are in the critical areas of secondary science.

- Most states set an exceedingly low bar for special education teachers. A full 35 states allow special education teachers to earn a generic license to teach special education students in any grade, K-12.
- While 28 states require teaching candidates to have a 10-week summative practice-teaching experience, just three – **Florida, Indiana** and **Tennessee** – also require that the cooperating teacher assigned to help mentor and support the candidate is himself or herself a proven effective teacher.
- Very few states put any expectations on teacher preparation programs regarding the quality and effectiveness of the teachers those programs deliver. Only eight states – **Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina, Ohio, Tennessee** and **Texas** – have policy that includes the use of student achievement data to hold teacher preparation programs accountable for the effectiveness of the teachers they graduate.