

Blueprint for Change in Delaware

2010
State Teacher
Policy Yearbook



National Council on Teacher Quality

Acknowledgments

STATES

State education agencies remain our most important partners in this effort, and their extensive experience has helped to ensure the factual accuracy of the final product. Although this year's *Blueprint for Change* did not require the extensive review typically required of states, we still wanted to make sure that states' perspectives were represented. As such, each state received a draft of the policy updates we identified this year. We would like to thank all of the states for graciously reviewing and responding to our drafts.

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About the Yearbook

The 2010 *Blueprint for Change* is the National Council on Teacher Quality's fourth annual review of state laws, rules and regulations that govern the teaching profession. This year's *Yearbook* takes a different approach than our past editions, as it is designed as a companion to the 2009 *State Teacher Policy Yearbook*, NCTQ's most recent comprehensive report on state teacher policies.

The comprehensive *Yearbook*, a 52-volume state-by-state analysis produced biennially, examines the alignment of states' teacher policies with goals to improve teacher quality. The 2009 report, which addressed key policy areas such as teacher preparation, evaluation, alternative certification and compensation, found that states had much work to do to ensure that every child has an effective teacher. Next year we will once again conduct a comprehensive goal-by-goal analysis of all aspects of states' teacher policies.

In 2010, an interim year, we set out to help states prioritize among the many areas of teacher policy in need of reform. With so much to be done, state policymakers may be nonplussed about where to begin. The 2010 *Yearbook* offers each state an individualized blueprint, identifying state policies most in need of attention. Although based on our 2009 analyses, this edition also updates states' progress in the last year, a year that saw many states make significant policy changes, largely spurred by the Race to the Top competition. Rather than grade states, the 2010 *Blueprint for Change* stands as a supplement to the 2009 comprehensive report, updating states' positive and negative progress on *Yearbook* goals and specifying actions that could lead to stronger policies for particular topics such as teacher evaluation, tenure rules and dismissal policies.

As is our practice, in addition to a national summary report, we have customized this year's *Blueprint for Change* so that each state has its own edition highlighting its progress toward specific *Yearbook* goals. Each report also contains

charts and graphs showing how the state performed compared to other states. In addition, we point to states that are leading the way in areas requiring the most critical attention across the country.

We hope that this year's *Blueprint for Change* serves as an important guide for governors, state school chiefs, school boards, legislatures and the many advocates seeking reform. Individual state and national versions of the 2010 *Blueprint for Change*, as well as the 2009 *State Teacher Policy Yearbook*—including rationales and supporting research for our policy goals—are available at www.nctq.org/stpy.



Blueprint for Change in Delaware

The 2009 *State Teacher Policy Yearbook* provided a comprehensive review of states' policies that impact the teaching profession. As a companion to last year's comprehensive state-by-state analysis, the 2010 edition provides each state with an individualized "Blueprint for Change," building off last year's *Yearbook* goals and recommendations.

State teacher policy addresses a great many areas, including teacher preparation, certification, evaluation and compensation. With so many moving parts, it may be difficult for states to find a starting point on the road to reform. To this end, the following brief provides a state-specific roadmap, organized in three main sections.

- Section 1 identifies policy concerns that need **critical attention**, the areas of highest priority for state policymakers.
- Section 2 outlines "**low-hanging fruit**," policy changes that can be implemented in relatively short order.
- Section 3 offers a short discussion of some **longer-term systemic issues** that states need to make sure stay on the radar.

Current Status of Delaware's Teacher Policy

In the 2009 *State Teacher Policy Yearbook*, Delaware had the following grades:

 Overall Grade	Area 1: <i>Delivering Well Prepared Teachers</i>	F
	Area 2: <i>Expanding the Teaching Pool</i>	C+
	Area 3: <i>Identifying Effective Teachers</i>	D
	Area 4: <i>Retaining Effective Teachers</i>	C-
	Area 5: <i>Exiting Ineffective Teachers</i>	D

2010 Policy Update:

In the last year, many states made significant changes to their teacher policies, spurred in many cases by the Race to the Top competition. Based on a review of state legislation, rules and regulations, NCTQ has identified the following recent policy changes in Delaware:

Teacher Evaluation:

Delaware now requires a uniform teacher evaluation based on student achievement, and these evaluations will be considered in making decisions about tenure, teacher pay and promotions. New teachers must receive a minimum of two announced observations and one unannounced observation, resulting in a summative evaluation rating every year. Those who receive a rating of "needs improvement" or "ineffective" must have an improvement plan that may require additional observations. Experienced teachers who earn a rating of "highly effective" on their most recent summative evaluation must receive a minimum of one announced observation each year with a summative evaluation at least once every two years. However, the "student improvement" component must be evaluated every year, and teachers cannot be rated "effective" unless they have met growth targets.

Delaware Administrative Code 14.106A

■ **Tenure:**

The state now requires that teachers must show two years of satisfactory student growth (evidenced by satisfactory ratings in the “student improvement” component of the teacher appraisal process) within a three-year period before they receive tenure.

S.B. 263

■ **Delaware Response to Policy Update:**

States were asked to review NCTQ’s identified updates and also to comment on policy changes that have occurred in the last year, other pending changes or teacher quality in the state more generally.

- Delaware was helpful in providing NCTQ with additional information about recent policy changes. The state added that its new regulation regarding teacher evaluations does not go into effect until July 1, 2011.

Section 1: Critical Attention Areas

This section identifies the highest priority areas as states work to advance teacher quality. These are the policy issues that should be at the top of the list for state policymakers. While other states need also to address connecting teacher evaluation and tenure to teacher effectiveness as well as middle school teacher preparation, Delaware should turn its immediate attention to the following six issues.



Critical Attention: Delaware policies that need to better connect to teacher effectiveness

1. PREVENT INEFFECTIVE TEACHERS FROM REMAINING IN THE CLASSROOM INDEFINITELY:

Although Delaware has recently taken significant steps to improve its evaluation and tenure systems, the state's current process for terminating ineffective teachers may undermine those efforts. Delaware should explicitly make teacher ineffectiveness grounds for dismissal so that districts do not feel they lack the legal basis for terminating consistently poor performers, and it should steer clear of euphemistic terms that are ambiguous at best and may be interpreted as concerning dereliction of duty rather than ineffectiveness. In Delaware, the process is the same regardless of the grounds for dismissal, which include "immorality, misconduct in office, incompetency, disloyalty, neglect of duty, will-

ful and persistent insubordination, a reduction in the number of teachers required as a result of decreased enrollment, or a decrease in education services."

Nonprobationary teachers who are dismissed for any grounds, including ineffectiveness, are entitled to due process. However, cases that drag on for years drain resources from school districts and create a disincentive for districts to attempt to terminate poor performers. Therefore, the state must ensure that the opportunity to appeal occurs only once and only at the district level and involves only adjudicators with educational expertise.

This statute remaining on the books could be at odds with Delaware's new evaluation policy, which clearly

intends to empower districts to remove underperforming teachers.

Dismissal is a critical attention area in

46 states.

States on the right track include Oklahoma and Rhode Island.

Figure 1

Is classroom effectiveness considered in teacher evaluations and tenure decisions?

	Evaluations include student achievement data	Evidence of student learning is the preponderant criterion in teacher evaluations	Evidence of student learning is the preponderant criterion in tenure decisions
Alabama	☐	☐	☐
Alaska	☐	☐	☐
Arizona	☒	☐	☐
Arkansas	☐	☐	☐
California	☐	☐	☐
Colorado	☒	☒	☒
Connecticut	☒	☐	☐
DELAWARE	☒	☒	☒
District of Columbia ¹	☐	☐	☐
Florida	☒	☒	☐
Georgia	☐	☐	☐
Hawaii	☐	☐	☐
Idaho	☐	☐	☐
Illinois	☒	☐	☐
Indiana	☐	☐	☐
Iowa	☐	☐	☐
Kansas	☐	☐	☐
Kentucky	☐	☐	☐
Louisiana	☒	☒	☐
Maine	☐	☐	☐
Maryland ²	☒	☒	☐
Massachusetts	☐	☐	☐
Michigan	☒	☐	☐
Minnesota	☐	☐	☐
Mississippi	☐	☐	☐
Missouri	☐	☐	☐
Montana	☐	☐	☐
Nebraska	☐	☐	☐
Nevada	☐	☐	☐
New Hampshire	☐	☐	☐
New Jersey	☐	☐	☐
New Mexico	☐	☐	☐
New York	☒	☐	☐
North Carolina	☐	☐	☐
North Dakota	☐	☐	☐
Ohio	☒	☐	☐
Oklahoma	☒	☒	☒
Oregon	☐	☐	☐
Pennsylvania	☐	☐	☐
Rhode Island	☒	☒	☒
South Carolina	☒	☒	☐
South Dakota	☐	☐	☐
Tennessee	☒	☒	☐
Texas	☒	☒	☐
Utah	☐	☐	☐
Vermont	☐	☐	☐
Virginia	☐	☐	☐
Washington	☐	☐	☐
West Virginia	☐	☐	☐
Wisconsin	☐	☐	☐
Wyoming	☐	☐	☐
	16	10	4

1 The District of Columbia has no state-level policy, but District of Columbia Public Schools requires that student academic achievement count for 50% of evaluation score.

2 Legislation articulates that student growth must account for a significant portion of evaluations, with no single criterion counting for more than 35% of the total performance evaluation. However, the State Board is on track to finalize regulations that limit any single component of student growth, such as standardized test scores, to 35%, but add other measures of student progress for a total of 50%.



Critical Attention: Delaware policies that fail to ensure that teachers are well prepared

2. ENSURE THAT ELEMENTARY TEACHERS KNOW THE SCIENCE OF READING:

Preparation to teach reading is a critical attention area in

43 states.

States on the right track include Connecticut, Massachusetts and Virginia.

Scientific research has shown that there are five essential components of effective reading instruction: explicit and systematic instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. This science of reading has led to breakthroughs that can dramatically reduce

the number of children destined to become functionally illiterate or barely literate adults. Whether through standards or coursework requirements, states must ensure that their preparation programs graduate only teacher candidates who know how to teach children to read. Not only should Delaware require that its teacher preparation programs prepare their teacher candidates in the science of reading, but the state should also require an assessment prior to certification that tests whether teachers indeed possess the requisite knowledge in scientifically based reading instruction. Ideally this would be a stand-alone test (such as the excellent assessments required by Massachusetts, Connecticut and Virginia), but if it were combined with general pedagogy or elementary content, the state should require a separate subscore for the science of reading.

3. ENSURE THAT ELEMENTARY TEACHERS KNOW ELEMENTARY CONTENT MATH:

Aspiring elementary teachers must begin to acquire a deep conceptual knowledge of the mathematics they will teach, moving well beyond mere procedural understanding. Leading mathematicians and math educators have found that elementary teachers are not well served by mathematics courses designed for a general audience and that methods courses do not provide sufficient content preparation. Although the standards Delaware relies on for teacher preparation address areas of mathematics such as

algebra, geometry and data analysis, the state should specifically articulate that preparation programs deliver mathematics content geared to the explicit needs of elementary teachers. Delaware should also adopt a rigorous mathematics assessment, such as the one required by Massachusetts. At the very least, the state should consider requiring a mathematics subscore on its general content knowledge test, not only to ensure that teacher candidates have minimum mathematics knowledge but also to allow them to test out of coursework requirements.

Preparation to teach mathematics is a critical attention area in

49 states.

A state on the right track is Massachusetts.

Figure 2

Do states ensure that teachers are well prepared?

	Ensures elementary teachers know the science of reading	Ensures elementary teachers know elementary content math	Differentiates preparation between elementary and middle school teachers
Alabama	☐	☐	☒
Alaska	☐	☐	☐
Arizona	☐	☐	☐
Arkansas	☐	☐	☒
California	☐ ¹	☐	☐
Colorado	☐	☐	☐
Connecticut	☒	☐	☒
DELAWARE	☐	☐	☒
District of Columbia	☐	☐	☒
Florida	☐ ²	☐	☒
Georgia	☐	☐	☒
Hawaii	☐	☐	☒
Idaho	☐	☐	☐
Illinois	☐	☐	☐
Indiana	☐	☐	☒
Iowa	☐	☐	☒
Kansas	☐	☐	☒
Kentucky	☐	☐	☒
Louisiana	☐	☐	☒
Maine	☐	☐	☐
Maryland	☐	☐	☒
Massachusetts	☒	☒	☒
Michigan	☐	☐	☐
Minnesota	☒	☒	☐
Mississippi	☐	☐	☒
Missouri	☐	☐	☒
Montana	☐	☐	☐
Nebraska	☐	☐	☐
Nevada	☐	☐	☐
New Hampshire	☐	☐	☐
New Jersey	☐	☐	☒
New Mexico	☐	☐	☐
New York	☐	☐	☒
North Carolina	☐	☐	☒
North Dakota	☐	☐	☐
Ohio	☐	☐	☒
Oklahoma	☒	☐	☐
Oregon	☐	☐	☐
Pennsylvania	☐	☐	☒
Rhode Island	☐	☐	☐
South Carolina	☐	☐	☒
South Dakota	☐	☐	☐
Tennessee	☒	☐	☒
Texas	☐	☐	☒
Utah	☐	☐	☐
Vermont	☐	☐	☒
Virginia	☒	☐	☒
Washington	☐	☐	☐
West Virginia	☐	☐	☒
Wisconsin	☐	☐	☐
Wyoming	☐	☐	☒
	6	2	29

¹ Although California has a standalone test of reading pedagogy, the ability of this test to screen out candidates who do not know the science of reading has been questioned.

² Florida's licensure test for elementary teachers includes a strong focus on the science of reading but does not report a separate subscore for this content.



Critical Attention: Delaware policies that license teachers who may lack subject-matter knowledge

4. CLOSE LICENSURE LOOPHOLES TO ENSURE THAT TEACHERS KNOW THE CONTENT THEY TEACH:

Licensure loopholes are a critical attention area in

34 states.

States on the right track include Mississippi, Nevada and New Jersey.

All students are entitled to teachers who know the subject matter they are teaching. Permitting individuals who have not yet passed state licensing tests to teach neglects the needs of students, instead extending personal consideration to adults who may not be

able to meet minimal state standards. Licensing tests are an important minimum benchmark in the profession, and states that allow teachers to postpone passing these tests are abandoning one of the basic responsibilities of licensure.

Delaware should ensure that all teachers pass all required subject-matter licensure tests before they enter the classroom so that students will not be at risk of having teachers who lack sufficient or appropriate content-area knowledge. However, the state allows new teachers who have not passed required licensing tests to teach on a three-year emergency certificate. If conditional or provisional licenses are deemed necessary, then Delaware should only issue them under limited and exceptional circumstances and for no longer than a period of one year.

5. ENSURE THAT ELEMENTARY CONTENT TESTS ADEQUATELY ASSESS CONTENT KNOWLEDGE IN EACH SUBJECT AREA:

Although Delaware requires that all new elementary teachers must pass a Praxis II general subject-matter test, this assessment does not report teacher performance in each subject area, meaning that it is possible to pass the test and still fail some subject areas. The state should require separate passing scores for each area because without them it is impossible to measure knowledge of individual subjects, especially given the state's current low passing score for the elementary content test. According to published test data, Delaware has set its passing score for this test considerably below the mean, the average score of all test takers, so it is questionable whether this assessment is indeed providing any assurance of content knowledge.

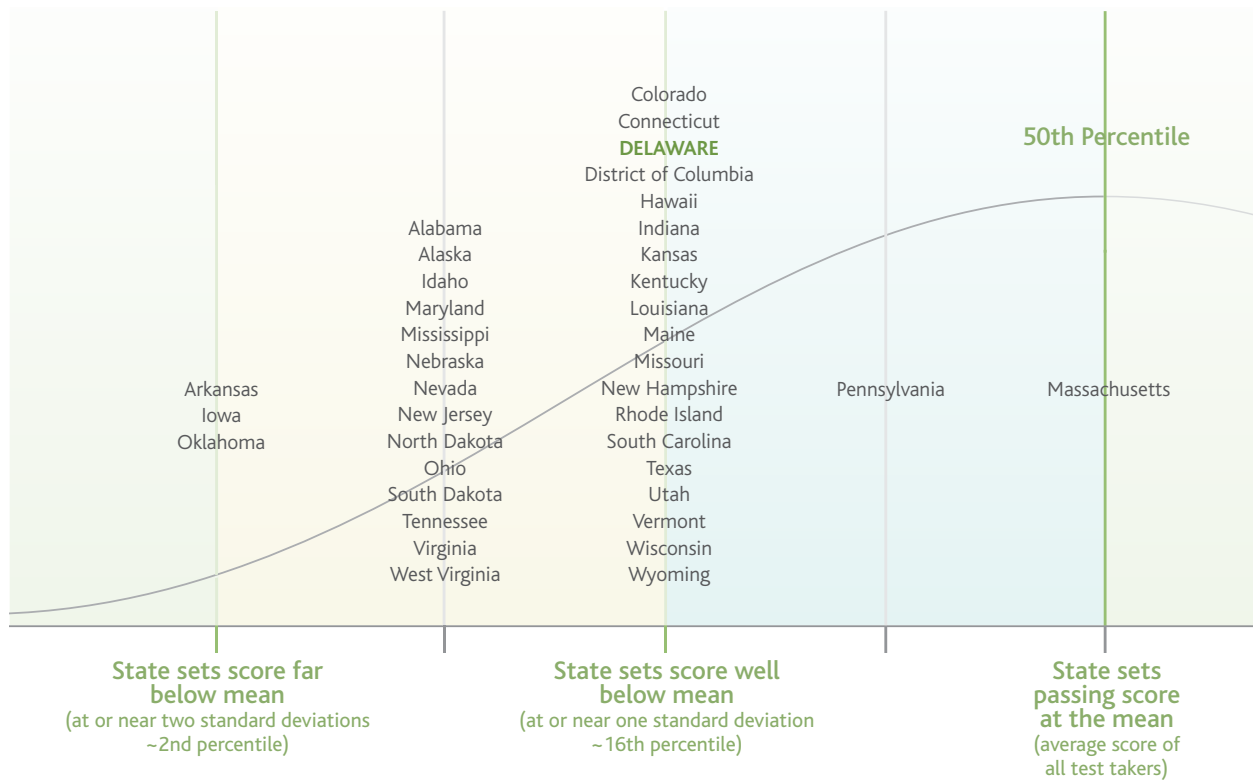
Elementary licensure tests are a critical attention area in

50 states.

A state on the right track is Massachusetts.

Figure 3

Where do states set the passing score on elementary content licensure tests?¹



¹ Data not available for Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, and Washington. Montana does not require a content test. Colorado cut score is for Praxis II, not PLACE.



Critical Attention: Delaware policies that limit the teacher pipeline

6. PROVIDE FLEXIBILITY TO ALTERNATE ROUTE TEACHERS IN DEMONSTRATING CONTENT KNOWLEDGE:

Alternative certification can create a new pipeline of potential teachers for those with valuable knowledge and skills who did not prepare to teach as undergraduates. While it is critical that all teachers know the content they will teach, requiring alternate route teachers to have a major in their subject area rules out talented individuals with deep knowledge that may have been gained through related study or work experience. Such candidates will likely be disinclined to fulfill the requirements of a new degree and should be permitted to demonstrate their content knowledge by passing a rigorous test. Delaware currently does not provide a test-out

option for all of its alternate route teacher candidates, instead requiring that candidates have a content-area major or its equivalent in coursework hours and pass a content-area test within a year of entering the classroom. An exception is made for candidates enrolled in Teach For America or an approved teacher residency program. Such candidates are not required to have a content-area major and must pass a subject-area test before entering the classroom. The state should make demonstration of subject matter knowledge a condition of admission to the alternate route program for all candidates. With this requirement in place, the state should then permit all candidates to demonstrate their subject-matter knowledge through the content test without also requiring a major or equivalent coursework.

Alternate route admissions is a critical attention area in

38 states.

States on the right track include Michigan and Oklahoma.

Figure 4

*Do states permit
alternate route providers
other than colleges and
universities?*

	Allows district run programs	Allows non-profit providers	Allows colleges and universities only
Alabama	☐	☐	☒
Alaska ¹	☐	☐	☐
Arizona	☒	☐	☐
Arkansas	☐	☒	☐
California	☒	☒	☐
Colorado	☒	☒	☐
Connecticut	☐	☒	☐
DELAWARE	☐	☒	☐
District of Columbia	☒	☒	☐
Florida	☒	☒	☐
Georgia	☒	☒	☐
Hawaii	☐	☐	☒
Idaho	☐	☐	☒
Illinois	☐	☒	☐
Indiana	☐	☐	☒
Iowa	☐	☐	☒
Kansas	☐	☐	☒
Kentucky	☒	☒	☐
Louisiana	☐	☒	☐
Maine	☐	☐	☒
Maryland	☒	☒	☐
Massachusetts	☒	☒	☐
Michigan	☐	☐	☒
Minnesota	☐	☐	☒
Mississippi	☐	☒	☐
Missouri	☐	☐	☒ ²
Montana	☐	☐	☒
Nebraska	☐	☐	☒
Nevada	☐	☐	☒
New Hampshire	☒	☐	☐
New Jersey	☐	☐	☒
New Mexico	☐	☐	☒
New York	☒	☒	☐
North Carolina	☒	☐	☐
North Dakota ³	☐	☐	☐
Ohio	☐	☐	☒
Oklahoma	☐	☒	☐
Oregon	☐	☐	☒
Pennsylvania	☐	☐	☒ ²
Rhode Island	☐	☒	☐
South Carolina	☐	☐	☒ ²
South Dakota	☐	☒	☐
Tennessee	☒	☒	☐
Texas	☒	☒	☐
Utah	☒	☐	☐
Vermont	☐	☐	☒
Virginia	☒	☒	☐
Washington	☒	☒	☐
West Virginia	☒	☐	☐
Wisconsin	☒	☒	☐
Wyoming	☐	☐	☒
	19	23	21

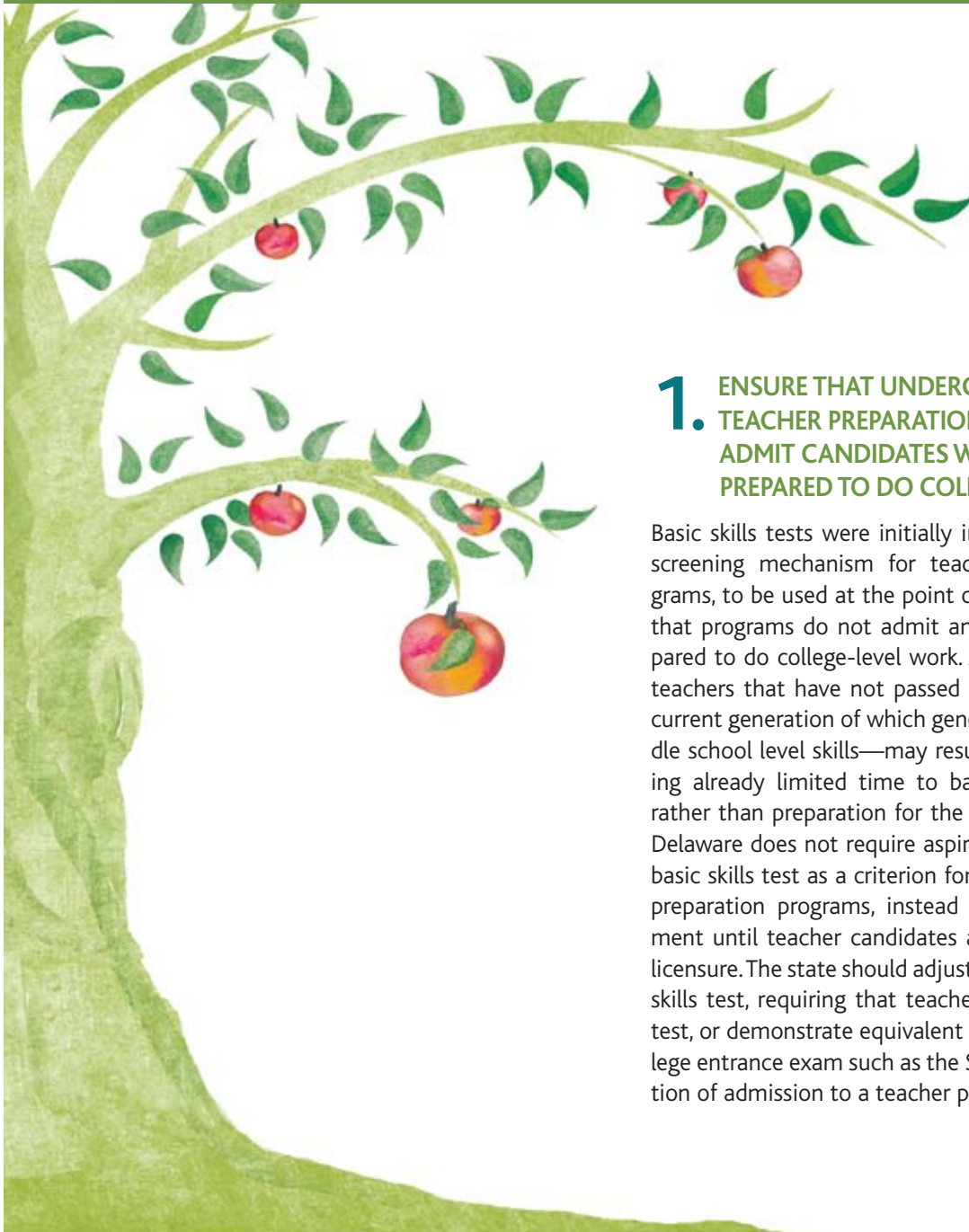
¹ Alaska's alternate route is operated by the state department of education.

² ABCTE is also an approved provider.

³ North Dakota does not have an alternate route to certification.

Section 2: Low-Hanging Fruit

This section highlights areas where a small adjustment would result in significantly stronger policy. Unlike the more complex topics identified in Section 1, the issues listed in this section represent low-hanging fruit, policies that can be addressed in relatively short order.



1. ENSURE THAT UNDERGRADUATE TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS ADMIT CANDIDATES WHO ARE PREPARED TO DO COLLEGE-LEVEL WORK:

Basic skills tests were initially intended as a minimal screening mechanism for teacher preparation programs, to be used at the point of admission to ensure that programs do not admit anyone who is not prepared to do college-level work. Admitting prospective teachers that have not passed basic skills tests—the current generation of which generally assess only middle school level skills—may result in programs devoting already limited time to basic skills remediation rather than preparation for the classroom. At present, Delaware does not require aspiring teachers to pass a basic skills test as a criterion for admission to teacher preparation programs, instead delaying the requirement until teacher candidates are ready to apply for licensure. The state should adjust the timing of its basic skills test, requiring that teacher candidates pass the test, or demonstrate equivalent performance on a college entrance exam such as the SAT or ACT, as a condition of admission to a teacher preparation program.

2. ENSURE THAT SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS ARE ADEQUATELY PREPARED TO TEACH SUBJECT MATTER:

To allow special education students the opportunity to reach their academic potential, special education teachers should be well trained in subject matter. As a first step toward ensuring requisite content knowledge, Delaware should require that elementary special education candidates pass the same Praxis II subject-area test as other elementary teachers.

3. STRENGTHEN TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAM ACCOUNTABILITY:

As part of its successful Race to the Top application, Delaware has commendably made objective outcomes a central component of its teacher preparation program approval process. However, the state should codify these requirements so that they continue to be in effect even when the four-year grant period has expired.

4. ENSURE THAT OUT-OF-STATE TEACHERS MEET THE STATE'S TESTING REQUIREMENTS:

Delaware should uphold its standards for all teachers and insist that out-of-state teachers meet its own licensure test requirements. While it is important not to create unnecessary obstacles for teachers seeking reciprocal licensure in a new state, testing requirements can provide an important safeguard. Particularly given the variance of the passing scores required on licensure tests, states must not assume that a teacher that passed another state's test would meet its pass-

ing score as well. Delaware takes considerable risk by granting a waiver for its licensing tests to any out-of-state teacher who has passed a test in another state. The state should not provide any waivers of its teacher tests unless an applicant can provide evidence of a passing score under its own standards. The negative impact on student learning stemming from a teacher's inadequate subject-matter knowledge is not mitigated by the teacher's having met another state's standards.

5. REPORT SCHOOL-LEVEL DATA TO SUPPORT THE EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF TEACHERS:

Delaware currently publicly reports the ratio of new to veteran teachers as well as the percentage of highly qualified teachers and teacher turnover at the school level. The state also reports on the percentage of teachers on emergency credentials but only at the district-level. In order to promote the equitable distribution of teacher talent among schools within districts, these data should also be reported at the individual school level.

6. REQUIRE SUBJECT-MATTER TEST AS CONDITION OF ADMISSION TO ALTERNATE ROUTE:

As previously addressed in the Critical Attention section of this report, the state should require all alternate route candidates to pass a content-area test prior to being admitted to alternate route programs. Delaware's current policy permits candidates to pass the test by "the end of the next fiscal year after hire." Altering the timeline so that candidates must pass the test prior to program admission would ensure that candidates know their subject matter before entering the classroom.

Section 3: Systemic Issues

This section discusses some of the longer-term systemic issues related to teacher quality that states also need to address. While these may not be “front-burner” issues in many states, they are important to an overall reform agenda.

1. Performance Management

The critical relationship between teacher quality and student achievement has been well established, and ensuring that all students have teachers with the knowledge and skills to support their academic success has become a national priority. Yet the policy framework that governs the teaching profession in most states is almost entirely disconnected from teacher effectiveness. Although states largely control how teachers are evaluated, licensed and compensated, teacher effectiveness in terms of student learning has not been a central component in these policies.

Fortunately, this is starting to change. Fifteen states, including Delaware, have made progress in their requirements for teacher evaluation in the last year alone.¹ As evaluation ratings become more meaningful, states should plan to connect teacher evaluation to an overall system of performance management. The current siloed approach, with virtually no connection between meaningful evidence of teacher performance and the awarding of tenure and professional licensure,

needs a fundamental overhaul. These elements must not be thought of as isolated and discrete, but as part of a comprehensive performance system. This system should also include compensation strategies as well as new teacher support and ongoing professional development, creating a coordinated and aligned set of teacher policies.

Meaningful evaluation is at the center of a performance management system. Delaware is already working to ensure that evaluations measure teacher effectiveness. As the state continues to move forward, it should keep in mind the larger goal of creating a performance management system.

A successful performance management system—one that gives educators the tools they need to be effective, supports their development, rewards their accomplishments and holds them accountable for results—is essential to the fundamental goal of all education reform: eliminating achievement gaps and ensuring that all students achieve to their highest potential.

¹ Includes changes to state policies regulating the frequency of evaluations for probationary and nonprobationary teachers as well as requirements that teacher evaluations consider classroom effectiveness.

2. Pension Reform

State pension systems are in need of a fundamental overhaul. In an era when retirement benefits have been shrinking across industries and professions, teachers' generous pensions remain fixed. In fact, nearly all states, including Delaware, continue to provide teachers with a defined benefit pension system, an expensive and inflexible model that neither reflects the realities of the modern workforce nor provides equitable benefits to all teachers.

The current model greatly disadvantages teachers who move from one state to another, career switchers who enter teaching and those who teach for fewer than 20 years. For these reasons alone, reform is needed. But a defined benefit model is also extremely costly, relying in large part on current workers to fund benefits promised to retirees. Although

Delaware's 2009 actuarial report indicates its system was 98.8 percent funded,¹ the state should be concerned about the cost of sustaining promised benefits. Many states' systems are in dubious financial health, including

some that appeared even recently to be well funded. All states need to take a long-term view of their pension systems, since it is exceedingly difficult to reduce promised benefits once teachers are members of the system. In addition, Delaware should consider whether the benefits provided by its current model attract the most effective teachers.

Systemic reform should lead to the development of a financially sustainable, equitable pension system that includes the following:

- The option of a fully portable pension system as teachers' primary pension plan, either through a defined contribution plan or a defined benefit plan that is formatted similar to a cash balance plan²

\$577,927

Amount Delaware pays for each teacher that retires at an early age with unreduced benefits until that teacher reaches age 65⁴

- Reasonable district and teacher contribution rates
- Vesting for teachers no later than the third year of employment
- Purchase of time in a defined benefit plan for unlimited previous teaching experience at the time of employment, as well as for all official leaves of absence, such as maternity and paternity leave
- The option in a defined benefit plan of a lump-sum rollover to a personal retirement account upon employment termination, which includes teacher contributions and all accrued interest at a fair interest rate
- Funds contributed by the employer included in withdrawals due to employment termination
- A neutral formula for determining pension benefits, regardless of years worked (eliminating any multiplier that increases with years of service or longevity bonuses)³
- Eligibility for retirement benefits based solely on age, not years of service, in order to avoid disincentives for effective teachers to continue working until conventional retirement age.

1 Public Fund Survey, <http://www.publicfundsurvey.org/www/publicfundsurvey/actuarialfundinglevels.asp>.

2 A cash balance pension plan is a benefit plan in which participants, and their employers if they choose, periodically contribute a predetermined rate to employees' individual pension accounts. These contributions grow at a guaranteed rate. Upon retirement or withdrawal, the participant may receive the full account balance in one lump sum, so long as the benefits are fully vested. (Based on Economic Research Institute, <http://www.eridlc.com/resources/index.cfm?fuseaction=resource.glossary>)

3 The formula may include years of service (i.e., years of service x final average salary x benefit multiplier), but other aspects of the benefit calculation, such as the multiplier, should not be dependent on years of service.

4 Calculations are based on a teacher who starts teaching at age 22, earns a starting salary of \$35,000 that increases 3 percent per year, and retires at the age when he or she is first eligible for unreduced benefits. Calculations use the state's benefit formula for new hires, exclude cost of living increases, and base the final average salary on the highest three years. Age 65 is the youngest eligibility age for unreduced Social Security benefits.

3. Certification of Special Education Teachers

States' requirements for the preparation of special education teachers are one of the most neglected and dysfunctional areas of teacher policy. The low expectations for what special education teachers should know stand in stark contradiction to state and federal expectations that special education students should meet the same high standards as other students.

Delaware, like most states, sets an exceedingly low bar for the content knowledge that special education teachers must have. The state does not require that elementary special education teachers take any subject-matter coursework or demonstrate content knowledge on a subject-matter test. Further, although secondary special education teachers must be highly qualified in every subject they will teach, the state does not require that teacher preparation programs graduate teachers who are highly qualified in any core academic areas.

But the problem requires a more systemic fix than just raising content requirements for elementary and secondary special education teachers. The overarching issue is that too many states make no distinction

between elementary and secondary special education teachers, certifying such teachers under a generic K-12 special education license. Even though Delaware offers an early childhood endorsement (birth to grade 2) for special education teachers, it also certifies special education teachers under a generic K-12 license. While this broad umbrella may be appropriate for teachers of low-incidence special education students, such as those with severe cognitive disabilities, it is deeply problematic for high-incidence special education students, who are expected to learn grade-level content. And because the overwhelming majority of special education students are in the high-incidence category, the result is a fundamentally broken system.

It is virtually impossible and certainly impractical for states to ensure that a K-12 teacher knows all the subject matter he or she is expected to be able to teach. And the issue is just as valid in terms of pedagogical knowledge. Teacher preparation and licensure for special education teachers must distinguish between elementary and secondary levels, as they do for general education. The current model does little to protect some of our most vulnerable students.

Figure 5

Do states distinguish between elementary and secondary special education teachers?

	Offers only a K-12 certification	Offers K-12 and grade-specific certification[s]	Does not offer a K-12 certification
Alabama	☐	☐	☒
Alaska	☐	☒	☐
Arizona	☒	☐	☐
Arkansas	☐	☐	☒
California	☒	☐	☐
Colorado	☒	☐	☐
Connecticut	☒	☐	☐
DELAWARE	☐	☒	☐
District of Columbia	☒	☐	☐
Florida	☒	☐	☐
Georgia	☐	☒	☐
Hawaii	☐	☒	☐
Idaho	☒	☐	☐
Illinois	☒	☐	☐
Indiana	☐	☒	☐
Iowa	☐	☐	☒
Kansas	☐	☒	☐
Kentucky	☒	☐	☐
Louisiana	☐	☒	☐
Maine	☐	☐	☒
Maryland	☐	☐	☒
Massachusetts	☐	☐	☒
Michigan	☐	☒	☐
Minnesota	☐	☒	☐
Mississippi	☒	☐	☐
Missouri	☐	☒	☐
Montana	☒	☐	☐
Nebraska	☐	☒	☐
Nevada	☒	☐	☐
New Hampshire	☐	☒	☐
New Jersey	☒	☐	☐
New Mexico	☒	☐	☐
New York	☒	☐	☐
North Carolina	☒	☐	☐
North Dakota	☐	☒	☐
Ohio	☒	☐	☐
Oklahoma	☒	☐	☐
Oregon	☐	☐	☒
Pennsylvania ¹	☐	☐	☒
Rhode Island	☐	☐	☒
South Carolina	☒	☐	☐
South Dakota	☐	☒	☐
Tennessee	☐	☒	☐
Texas	☒	☐	☐
Utah	☒	☐	☐
Vermont	☐	☐	☒
Virginia	☒	☐	☐
Washington	☐	☒	☐
West Virginia	☐	☐	☒
Wisconsin	☐	☐	☒
Wyoming	☐	☒	☐
	22	17	12

¹ New policy goes into effect January 1, 2013.



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NCTQ is available to work with individual states to improve teacher policies.

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