

## Getting Teachers Where They Are Needed Most

### Can License Reciprocity Facilitate Mobility?

#### IN THIS WATCH

Can license reciprocity agreements alleviate shortages of special education teachers? What state policymakers should consider.

Although schools have suffered shortages of special education teachers for decades, shortages vary across states. State policies designed to promote the movement of teachers from areas of surplus to areas of need have been offered as solutions for meeting unmet demands. License reciprocity—a policy through which states deem teachers *fully* qualified on the basis of a license earned in another state—is one such strategy.

Although even the best existing reciprocity agreements entail completing additional requirements, national and regional models provide states with a way to recognize qualified teachers from other states. Common examples include:

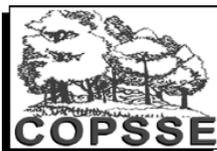
- **NASDTEC Interstate Contract.** The National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC) oversees the contract that guarantees that current member states—48 states and jurisdictions—will accept another member state's teacher preparation programs and licensure process to the degree that they are comparable with their own standards.
- **Regional reciprocity agreements between states.** The primary ben-

efits of regional agreements—such as the Northeast Regional Credential and the Central States Teacher Exchange Agreement—include their greater specificity and agreement on complex aspects of licensure, such as special education, and their potential to set uniform standards for teacher preparation.

License reciprocity has many advantages, the most significant being its usefulness in assisting states with their primary goal of ensuring that special education teachers moving into their state meet minimal qualifications and standards. Reciprocity agreements also benefit teachers by providing ready access to professional credentials in other states that share common views on teaching standards and teacher preparation. In so doing, such agreements also enhance teaching as a profession.

But, do licensing reciprocity agreements *also* facilitate interstate mobility and thereby reduce shortages? What do states need to consider when using license reciprocity agreements to meet special education teacher shortages? Read on to gain insights from the research.

FEBRUARY 2004  
PB-15



CENTER ON PERSONNEL  
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EDUCATION

### ***Alleviating Special Education Teacher Shortages—Have You Considered Why License Reciprocity Agreements May Have Limited Potential?***

The logic underlying license reciprocity as a solution to special education teacher shortages derives from the assumptions that pools of unemployed, fully credentialed teachers exist and that those teachers would be willing to relocate to other states if only they had license portability. Let's examine this assumption.

Although shortages are unevenly distributed, both across and within states, most states report persistent and significant shortages of qualified special education teachers. Thus, teacher movement from state to state would merely shift the shortage burden from one jurisdiction to another.

Reciprocity agreements also are based on the assumption that there is a large pool of qualified teachers who have either moved or could be enticed to move if reciprocity agreements were more favorable. Yet, the facts show that the number of teachers who have moved and who are unable to

obtain full certification in their new home state is small. Ten percent of teachers have relocated from another state to assume their current positions, but only 1.08 percent are not fully certified. This suggests that most teachers have

little trouble getting certified in their new home states. Thus, the best current estimate of the proportion of the special education workforce that might benefit from an improved reciprocity policy is a little more than one percent.

State-to-state mobility has limited potential for eliminating shortages. Areas of need may be better defined within individual states, rather than between states.

### ***Have You Considered Shortages Within States as a Target for Intervention?***

Most states report varied shortages within their boundaries. Certain schools are advantaged when it comes to hiring and retaining teachers. For example, shortages tend to be more severe in large urban areas and in rural areas, while suburbs often enjoy a surplus of qualified applicants. Consider these facts:

- Wealthy districts rarely experience shortages, whereas low-income districts do. Wealthy districts get more applicants.
- High-poverty districts may lack the resources to attract and retain highly qualified teachers.
- Teachers prefer to teach close to home. Since the teaching workforce is primarily middle class, home for most teachers is the suburbs or small towns.
- Reserve pool teachers—individuals who are qualified to teach but who are not currently teaching—tend not to return to large, urban schools when reentering the workforce.
- Teachers tend to move away from low-income schools. When economic considerations affect teacher reloca-

tion, the deciding factor is more likely to be a school's socio-economic status than a teacher's salary.

These considerations raise the question of whether areas of need may be better defined by school district socio-economic status than by state lines. Thus, providing incentives for teachers to work in urban and rural schools may be an additional tool for alleviating special education teacher shortages.

### ***For More Information***

Information reported in this brief was based on the COPSSE research synthesis, ***Getting Teachers Where They're Needed Most: The Case for Licensure Reciprocity***, by Paul T. Sindelar, Anne G. Bishop, Michele Gregoire-Gill, Vincent Connelly, and Michael S. Rosenberg. This document can be found on the COPSSE web site at [www.copsse.org](http://www.copsse.org).

### **WATCH THIS...**

**L**icensure reciprocity is particularly problematic for special education, as there tends to be a lack of state-to-state consistency in how licenses are differentiated by disability categories, severity, and/or age levels.



#### **About COPSSE**

The Center on Personnel Studies in Special Education is funded by the Office of Special Education Programs of the U.S. Department of Education [cooperative agreement #H325Q000002]. COPSSE research is designed to inform scholars and policymakers about beginning teacher quality, effective initial preparation, and the effects of preparation alternatives. The Center is directed by Drs. Paul Sindelar and Mary Brownell. The policy briefs were produced by Warger, Eavy & Associates.

University of Florida, 300 Norman Hall,  
P.O. Box 117050, Gainesville, FL 32611  
352-392-0701 (X283), [www.copsse.org](http://www.copsse.org)



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