

# Getting Teachers Where They're Needed Most: The Case for Licensure Reciprocity

Prepared for the Center on Personnel Studies in Special Education

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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COPSSE research is focused on the preparation of special education professionals and its impact on beginning teacher quality and student outcomes. Our research is intended to inform scholars and policymakers about advantages and disadvantages of preparation alternatives and the effective use of public funds in addressing personnel shortages.

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## INTRODUCTION

Proponents advance licensure reciprocity as a solution to the problem of teacher shortages. Analysis of national and regional reciprocity agreements suggests that relocation from state to state has limited potential to alleviate shortages and that areas of need are better defined by socioeconomic considerations (SES) than by state lines. A policy strategy with better potential for addressing shortages would provide incentives for teachers to work in low-SES urban and rural schools.

Special education had more than 43,000 teachers less than fully certified during the 2000-2001 school year. Although incentives for teachers to relocate from state to state can be expected to have limited impact on shortages nationwide, licensure reciprocity would: (a) provide individual teachers ready access to professional credentials in other states, (b) enhance teaching as a profession, and (c) promote teacher in-migration to states that suffer shortages.

## RECIPROCITY AND NATIONAL CERTIFICATION

### The NASDTEC Contract

The National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC) oversees the NASDTEC Interstate Contract (1999), an agreement that has become the primary means through which most states license qualified, in-migrating teachers. Established in 1928, the present contract has been accepted to some degree by 48 states and jurisdictions and is in effect through 2005. This agreement, formed by professional standards boards, commissions, and state departments of education in the United States and its territories, guarantees that member states will accept another member state's teacher preparation programs and licensure process to the degree that they are comparable with their own licensure and program standards.

For teachers and other education professionals, the NASDTEC Interstate Contract is the most comprehensive reciprocity agreement among states currently in force. The contract is flexible in that individual states may set their own criteria for licensing teachers. The strengths of the NASDTEC contract, in particular its flexibility and respect for states' autonomy, are also limitations. The contract offers teachers only limited reciprocity. Many states issue a provisional license, good for 1-2 years, to incoming teachers. Not every state recognizes every other member states' licenses, and not all states recognize all categories of teacher licensure. Thus, even an agreement as good as the NASDTEC contract has not done away with the problems that arise when large bureaucracies implement complex policy.

In special education, states may issue categorical licenses—that is, differentiated by disability categories—or noncategorical licenses, or both. Although special education licensure was originally categorical, today only 5 states offer categorical licenses only, 13 states are strictly noncategorical, and 22 offer both categorical and noncategorical licenses. Eleven states differentiate by severity, offering separate licenses to teach students with mild/moderate and severe/profound disabilities. A small number of otherwise noncategorical states distinguish by age level. The number of special education licenses awarded by the states ranges from 1 to 13. Given this lack of state-to-state consistency, it is small wonder that licensure reciprocity is a particular problem for special education.

### Regional Reciprocity Agreements

Due to the complexity and limitations of the NASDTEC agreement, many states have joined in regional reciprocity consortia. Regional agreements may cover teachers who are neglected by the NASDTEC contract. The primary benefits of regional agreements are their greater specificity and agreement on complex aspects of licensure, such as special education, as well as their potential to set uniform standards for teacher preparation. However, regional agreements have limitations: they do not guarantee true reciprocity, and in-migrating teachers must still apply for the state's own teaching license within a year or two.

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**NRC.** When instituted in 1990, the Northeast Regional Credential (NRC) set the standard for regional reciprocity agreements. Nine jurisdictions (New York, Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Vermont, and the District of Columbia) currently offer teachers the opportunity to become licensed. The NRC license is considered a true license, because teachers who hold this license are considered fully certified. In most cases, the NRC is valid for 2 years. The NRC has limited utility, because many of these northeastern states have established easier ways of obtaining licensure, particularly for broad areas such as elementary education. The primary advantage of the NRC license is that it offers an alternative if reciprocity with a state is difficult to achieve, as in special education.

**CSTEA.** Central States Teacher Exchange (CSTEA) is a 5-year agreement among Illinois, Missouri, Oklahoma, Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas, South Dakota, Michigan, and Wisconsin. Four (Wisconsin, Iowa, Missouri, and South Dakota) do not participate in the NASDTEC contract. Licensed teachers in any one of the participating states or those who have completed a regionally accredited teacher education program are eligible to receive a 2-year license in the receiving state.

**MOINKSA.** MOINKSA (an acronym of first letters of participating states' names) allows teachers who have earned a license in one of the participating states to receive a 2-year conditional license in another member state.

### **National Certification: NBPTS and INTASC**

An alternative to reciprocity is national licensure. The concept of national certification differs from the concept of national licensure. Whereas *licensure* refers to the satisfaction of minimum standards of competence, *certification* is recognition of significant professional accomplishment. Proponents argue that: (a) national licensure would standardize the preparation of the teaching work force and simplify licensure issues for states, and (b) universal adoption would mitigate the need for reciprocity agreements.

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) and the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) are the result of collaboration among professional organizations, state officials, and teacher educators. Although the original intent of these organizations was to establish model standards for the licensure of beginning teachers and the certification of accomplished veterans, INTASC and NBPTS provide coherent frameworks for states to consider when developing or refining licensure guidelines. Both NBPTS and INTASC contribute a new level of uniformity in teaching standards and have the potential to support reciprocal agreements among states.

NBPTS and INTASC standards reflect the expertise required of today's teachers. INTASC and NBPTS are fusing partnerships with the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), which accredits teacher preparation programs. The combined efforts of NBPTS, INTASC, and NCATE provide a common framework for program accreditation as well as teacher licensure and advanced certification.

## **THE LOGIC OF RECIPROCITY**

Reciprocity research and the research on supply and demand suggest an alternative policy strategy for coping with critical teacher shortages. This strategy does not rely on teachers' moving from state to state and would not be enhanced by improved reciprocity. Four sources of information pertain to this logic:

- size and distribution of state surpluses and shortages
- characteristics of the reserve pool and extent to which the reserve pool supplements supply
- likelihood that reciprocity causes reserve pool teachers to return to the classroom

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- effects of market conditions and other factors that may influence teacher mobility.

## TEACHER SHORTAGES

In special education, teacher shortages are real, chronic, and severe. U.S. Department of Education (USDE) reported that in 2000-2001 over 43,000 teachers were needed nationally to fill vacancies and replace less than fully qualified practitioners. This estimate undoubtedly includes some teachers who had moved and were unable to obtain “full certification” from their new home states. Because this number is likely to be small, from a national perspective and on the basis of shortage data, teacher movement from state to state would seem to solve nothing and merely to shift the shortage burden from one jurisdiction to another.

### The Reserve Pool

Improved reciprocity policy may foster *reserve pool* teachers’ reentry into teaching. To ascertain whether better reciprocity would promote relocation reentry, it would be necessary to determine if reserve pool members are willing to move across state lines—and are hampered in doing so by the lack of reciprocity or by the limitations of existing reciprocity agreements. Research results reviewed in the paper suggest that returning reserve pool members often do change districts, moving out of cities to suburbs and small towns. Such relocations may, but are not likely to, involve moving from state to state. Although improved reciprocity would facilitate such movement, any policy that promotes relocation to low-need districts will have limited impact on shortages.

### Within-State Variation

Studies of shortages within states also suggest that in hiring and retaining teachers certain schools are advantaged relative to others. When economic considerations do affect teachers’ relocation, the deciding factor is more likely to be a school’s SES than a teacher’s salary. High-poverty districts lack resources and working conditions to attract and retain good teachers.

### Teacher Mobility

Although the literature on teacher mobility clarifies little about the reciprocity question, several relationships from different studies are noted:

- Younger teachers are more mobile and more likely than older teachers to relocate to other states.
- Student characteristics (e.g., minority status, income) exert a more powerful influence on teacher mobility than salary.
- Three fourths of special education teachers are employed in the same state in which they were trained.
- Only 10% of teachers moved from one state to another to assume their current positions.

### Summary of Research on Reciprocity

Teacher shortages are severe, pervasive, and vary from state to state. Because shortages are nationwide, state-to-state migration would seem to solve nothing, except from the perspective of an individual state. On the other hand, many new hires come from a reserve pool of currently unemployed teachers, and improved reciprocity might facilitate their return to the work force. However, little is known about the extent to which reserve pool members cross state lines when returning to work. What we do know about their employment preferences suggests that they tend to move away from districts where need is greatest, and a similar pattern is evident in studies of teacher mobility. Teachers tend to leave jobs in high-poverty, low-performing schools and districts for jobs in higher SES and higher performing schools and districts. Often this pattern involves moving from cities to suburbs and towns. Thus, improving reciprocity to promote state-

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to-state relocation would seem to have limited impact on recruiting teachers for high-need schools. States have attempted to promote such movement with other policy initiatives.

## **OTHER POLICY INITIATIVES TO PROMOTE RELOCATION**

### **Salary Equalization**

To attract teachers to areas of critical shortages within the state, Connecticut and Kansas have implemented salary equalization programs across high-and low-need districts, and Mississippi offered a scholarship, professional development, a computer, mentoring, a home loan, and \$1,000 in moving expenses for teachers seeking master's degrees in return for at least 3 years of service.

### **Credit for Experience**

Credit for experience, which means position on a salary scale and corresponding benefits (e.g., health insurance, sick leave, professional development), may be a powerful incentive or disincentive to experienced teachers considering a move. For experienced teachers, the amount of credit offered for experience may be a critical element in their decisions to relocate. A few states (notably, Nevada, Texas, Washington) have complete portability for in-state teaching experience, whereas other states allow districts to grant credit.

### **Pension Portability**

Pension portability refers to the extent to which workers may transfer their retirement benefits without significant loss of value when they change jobs. Despite other inducements, experienced teachers may be reluctant to relocate if their retirement benefits are not fully transferable. States can have a greater influence in motivating experienced teachers to relocate by assuring pension portability than by recognizing teaching certificates.

### **Demographic Considerations**

Certain demographic aspects of our teaching force also influence teacher mobility. The paper reviews research that shows the effects of demographic variables. Women may choose teaching because of the flexibility it allows for leaving and returning to the work force if they choose to leave to raise families, for example. In addition, the teacher in a family is often not the primary wage earner, and spousal employment rather than market conditions or licensure reciprocity may be the determining factor.

### **Summary of States and Reciprocity**

Clearly, full reciprocity alone will not dramatically increase the number of qualified special educators who migrate to seek employment. In fact, relative to pensions and other benefits, licensure may exert little influence on teachers' decision-making, and lack of reciprocity may be considered more an inconvenience than a barrier. Still, reciprocity works to assist states with their primary goal of ensuring that special education teachers moving to their state meet minimal qualifications and standards. Many states use reciprocity agreements as a gate-keeping function, allowing ready access to credentials to those who come from other states that share common views of teaching (e.g., specific standards) and teacher preparation (e.g., categorical or noncategorical programming). Individuals who do not fulfill all requirements for a state license must complete course work or other prescribed activities. However, to attract qualified candidates in times of critical shortages, states may suspend requirements that limit reciprocity.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

The field is making progress in establishing national certification. INTASC and NBPTS standards are in place for beginning and experienced teachers, and states are signing on. However, because special education teacher shortages are nationwide, licensure reciprocity cannot alleviate shortages from a national perspective. The paper proposes that a sensible approach to addressing shortages

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is to promulgate policies that encourage teachers to work in disadvantaged urban and rural schools. Such relocation does not require the recruitment of out-of-state teachers, but to the extent that it does, in addition to improving reciprocity, states should:

- recognize in-migrating teachers' service, both on the salary scale and with regard to other benefits
- establish pension portability.

Future research must include:

- the proportion of new teacher hires who are state-to-state migrants, who migrates and why, and the extent to which teachers relocate in response to market conditions
- the proportion of reentering reserve pool members who relocate to new states and characteristics of the reserve pool
- policies that promote migration to high-need schools (state-to-state, district-to-district, or school-to-school).

The paper concludes that policies promoting relocation to high-needs schools have greater potential to solve the problem of shortages than licensure reciprocity.