

WILL: Study: reform teacher licensing to alleviate teacher shortage

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New review examines the role teaching licensing regulations may play in teacher shortage

The News: The Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty (WILL) issued a new report that takes a critical look at the way teacher licensing regulations may be contributing to a shortage of licensed teachers in Wisconsin and around the country. [Let Them Teach: A National Review of Teacher Licensure](#), by Jessica Holmberg, provide an in-depth review of the teacher shortage, teacher licensing, and paths to reform.

The Teacher Shortage: All 50 states are reporting a teacher shortage. Turnover is high. Teacher preparation programs are seeing decreased enrollment. One study indicates 30% of teachers leave the profession in the first five years. And more and more districts are relying on teachers with provisional and emergency licenses to staff schools.

The Role of Teacher Licensing: According to the Council for State Governments, teaching is one of the most heavily regulated professions in the country. In every state, teacher licensing requirements are different. But despite teacher shortages, states continue to pile on new requirements, red tape, and hurdles that may play a role in choking the teacher pipeline when every effort should be made to add and retain licensed teachers.

- The path to becoming a licensed teacher is long and difficult. A prospective teacher should expect at least four years of preparation and additional time for teacher licensing assessments and application processing time. As many as 20% of graduates from education preparation programs did not earn a teaching license in Wisconsin.

- Licensing specializations create additional barriers to licensure. Licensing specialization creates barriers by enforcing specific requirements according to grade range and/or subjects. Licensing specialization limits teacher mobility between states due to a license's narrow scope of practice and decreases the number of positions a teacher can fill. This specialization also makes it harder for school districts to fill teaching positions.
- Teaching licenses are only valid in the state where the license is issued and usually cannot be transferred to another state without additional work. Each state has different requirements that a candidate must meet to transfer their license. Teachers must not only show proof of education, but also show that their education and licensing requirements are similar or meet the new state's licensing requirements. These barriers feed into the teacher deficit by creating a complicated and burdensome process.
- Application fees in Wisconsin range from \$100-\$175 depending on the license. The State of Wisconsin estimates 6-8 weeks for in-state applications and 12-16 weeks for out-of-state.

Policy Recommendations: The teacher shortage cannot be solved with reforms to teacher licensure, alone. But red tape and regulations may play a role. Any and all reforms should be on the table to meet the teacher shortage that do not sacrifice quality in the classroom.

- We need better information. Comprehensive state-level teacher workforce data should be reported every year. It would be helpful to know more about unfilled teaching positions and the overall number of teachers needed to fill vacant positions.
- Reduce licensing specializations. Licensing specializations that limit a teacher's scope of practice lead to additional licensing requirements and create barriers through specialized coursework, student teaching, and assessments. This restricts intra-state mobility and reduces the pool of candidates for teaching jobs.
- Give school districts flexibility to hire unlicensed teachers. Instead of maintaining a state-level licensing requirement, school districts should have the power and flexibility to determine whether to hire licensed teachers for all open positions. Private schools throughout the country are not required by state law to hire licensed teachers and can choose to set their own standards.
- Limit standardized licensing assessments. Standardized assessments create a large hurdle for future teachers. An NCTQ analysis found that only 46% of candidates on average pass their content licensing exam the first time. States

like California have recently removed many licensing assessments finding they hurt more than helped.

- Adopt full teacher license reciprocity. Currently, only eight states allow teachers to “transfer” their licenses without additional requirements, while a majority of states may require additional assessments, experience, or coursework prior to full licensure. If all 50 states had full teaching reciprocity it may reduce the nation’s overall teacher shortage.