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JESSICA HOLMBERG

# LET THEM TEACH

**A NATIONAL REVIEW OF  
TEACHER LICENSURE**



**JESSICA HOLMBERG**

POLICY ASSOCIATE

✉ [info@will-law.org](mailto:info@will-law.org)

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# **Executive Summary**

Occupational licenses, such as teaching licenses, are common across the United States. WILL's Occupational Licensing Primer found that 20-25% of the nation's workforce is required to hold legal credentials.<sup>1</sup> The popular narrative has long been that licensing protects the health and safety of the public by ensuring the quality of work. As benevolent as that may sound, the reality is that occupational licenses often hurt more than help by creating unnecessary barriers that keep qualified professionals out of the workplace. A good example of this phenomenon is teacher licensure.

Approximately 3 million teachers work in the U.S. public school system, and over 50 million students in the U.S. rely on those teachers every day.<sup>2</sup> Like many occupational licenses, teacher licenses are quite burdensome to obtain and retain. In fact, the teaching profession has become the most regulated profession in the nation.<sup>3</sup>

Across the board, the country is facing severe shortages of licensed teachers. This shortage is a combination of fewer teaching candidates, as well as not having enough candidates who hold a proper teaching credential. This leaves many districts scrambling to hire teachers—many times relying on individuals who do not hold full teaching credentials. Despite the current shortage, states continue to add barriers like admissions requirements, licensing assessment, and renewal requirements under the guise that these steps are needed to produce qualified candidates for teaching. But do they?

This report includes a brief look at the current state of the teacher workforce, takes a deep dive into teacher licensing from requirements to models as well as offers state-level policy recommendations that seek to remove unnecessary barriers to teacher licensing. It is important to note that teacher licenses are required for teaching in the public school system in the United States. Private schools that often produce better student outcomes, however, do not have this state-level requirement.<sup>4</sup>

## Findings

**Teaching field shortages were reported in all 50 states.** Across the U.S., states report having a hard time hiring teachers. It isn't that there aren't necessarily enough candidates wanting to teach, but because the candidates don't hold the proper credentials to teach and the high-level of new teacher turnover. The most common teaching shortage areas are Special Education, English as a second language, math, and science. There was a reported 112,000 teacher deficit nationally in 2018.<sup>5</sup>

**The teaching profession sees high yearly turnover, especially among new teachers.** Unfortunately, high turnover is a fiscal drain on districts. In 2015 approximately 50% of teachers who left the profession in Wisconsin were not of retirement age. One study found filling a teaching vacancy costs \$21,000 per teacher on average.<sup>6</sup>

**Teacher preparation program enrollment is down.** Most states have reported declines in teacher preparation enrollment. For example, Wisconsin saw a 30% decrease in teacher preparation enrollment between the 2008-09 school year and 2016-17 school year, and an 8% decrease between the 2015-16 and



2016-17 school years. Minnesota and Illinois both experienced enrollment decreases of 50% or more over the same periods.<sup>7</sup>

**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.

**The tiered licensing model is increasing in popularity.** Currently 31 states, including Wisconsin, have a tiered licensing model.\* In recent years, more states have transitioned to this system as it is thought to give teachers a career advancement pathway without taking additional courses or programs outside the school district.

**Only four states have permanent teaching licenses.** Currently, only Wisconsin, Missouri, New Jersey, and West Virginia have permanent teaching licenses. Most states' standard teaching licenses are valid for five years or less and require additional work to renew.† Permanent licenses, however, do not expire or require continued education. Appendix A includes standard teaching licenses offered in each state.

**Over 50% of states require post-licensure mentorship.** 31 states, including Wisconsin, require a minimum of one year of mentoring during initial teaching years.

**States rely on limited licenses to get teachers in the classroom.** In Wisconsin, 30% of first-time licenses (Tier I or Tier II), or 12% of overall educator licenses (Tier I-IV) granted in 2020, were limited licenses (1-year license by stipulation). Candidates are eligible for a License by Stipulation if they have not completed all statutory requirements for full state licensure.

**Strong student teaching and mentorship programs may decrease turnover.** New teachers report feeling unprepared, especially in the pedagogy (methods or practice) of teaching in a classroom. Student teaching and additional support such as mentorship may help teachers feel more prepared and lead to less attrition.

## Policy Recommendations

**Comprehensive state-level teacher workforce data should be reported every year.** Teacher shortages have prevailed for over a decade yet there is a lack of reliable data showing the extent of our nation's teaching shortage. Transparency of data, such as unfilled teaching positions and the overall number of teachers needed to fill vacant positions would greatly benefit state leaders and policy makers.

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\* Appendix A includes list of tiered and non-tiered states.

† The valid length varies by state. Refer to appendix A for all states standard teaching licenses and valid length.

**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. Additionally, specializations restrict intra-state mobility by reducing the available jobs a candidate is eligible for.

**Give school districts flexibility to hire unlicensed teachers.** Instead of maintaining a state-level licensing requirement, school districts should have the power to determine whether or not to hire licensed teachers. Private schools throughout the country are not required by state law to hire licensed teachers and can choose to set their own standards.

**Create more alternative programs such as paraprofessional to teaching programs.** Alternative programs, such as Alverno College's Paraprofessional to Teacher program, create a streamlined process for getting more teachers in the classroom. The benefit of paraprofessionals (i.e. teacher's assistants), earning a teaching license is they already hold teaching experience and understand the jobs demand's, which hopefully leads to a decreased chance of turnover.<sup>8</sup>

**Limit standardized licensing assessments.** Standardized assessments create a large hurdle for future teachers. In fact, NCTQ analysis found that only 46% of candidates on average pass their content licensing exam the first time.<sup>9</sup> States like California have recently removed many licensing assessments as they found they hurt more than helped.<sup>10</sup>

**Remove licensing renewal requirements.** The majority of teaching licenses expire in five years or less. Unfortunately, this requires teachers to complete renewal requirements to continue working under their license. Luckily, in Wisconsin Tier III and Tier IV licenses do not have renewal requirements--an aspect of licensing which likely leads to additional turnover as the process can be costly and burdensome.

**Districts should implement mentorship or induction programs to retain teachers longer.** Keeping teachers, especially new teachers, in the classroom is a burden many school districts are facing. Through induction programs and mentorship teachers are supported and guided through their initial years of teaching, which hopefully leads to lower turnover rates overall.

**State statutes and guidance documents must be accurate and consistent.** The teacher licensure process is complex and confusing but is made even more so when inconsistent language or misinformation is given either in state law or in guidance documents. For example, Wisconsin's licensing regulations, PI 34, list the state's License by Reciprocity as a Tier I license, while the Department of Public Instruction correctly lists this as a Tier II license. This may seem like a small error, however, requirements and scopes of the licenses are different. Examples of this can be found throughout many state statutes and guidance documents.

**Full teacher license reciprocity should exist in all 50 states.** Licensing reciprocity should be as simple as transferring a teaching license from one state to another, but this is not often the case. 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 could reduce the nation's overall teacher shortage.

A photograph of a teacher standing in a classroom, writing on a whiteboard with a marker. The teacher is wearing a light-colored button-down shirt. The whiteboard has some faint writing on it. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent red filter.

# **Teacher Workforce**



*\*Uncommon terms are defined in the glossary*

The current state of our nation's teacher workforce is unstable, with estimated demand of teachers expected to outpace supply in the years to come.<sup>11</sup> The profession has seen field shortages, increased teacher turnover, and an overall decrease in educator preparation program (EPP) enrollment. The result is that school districts are struggling to hire teachers, or relying on teachers with limited licenses to fill vacant positions. In fact, in 2020 Wisconsin granted nearly 2,500 limited licenses (Licenses by Stipulations) and over 8,800 first-time licenses (Provisional licenses).

## Educator Preparation Program (EPP) Enrollment Is Down

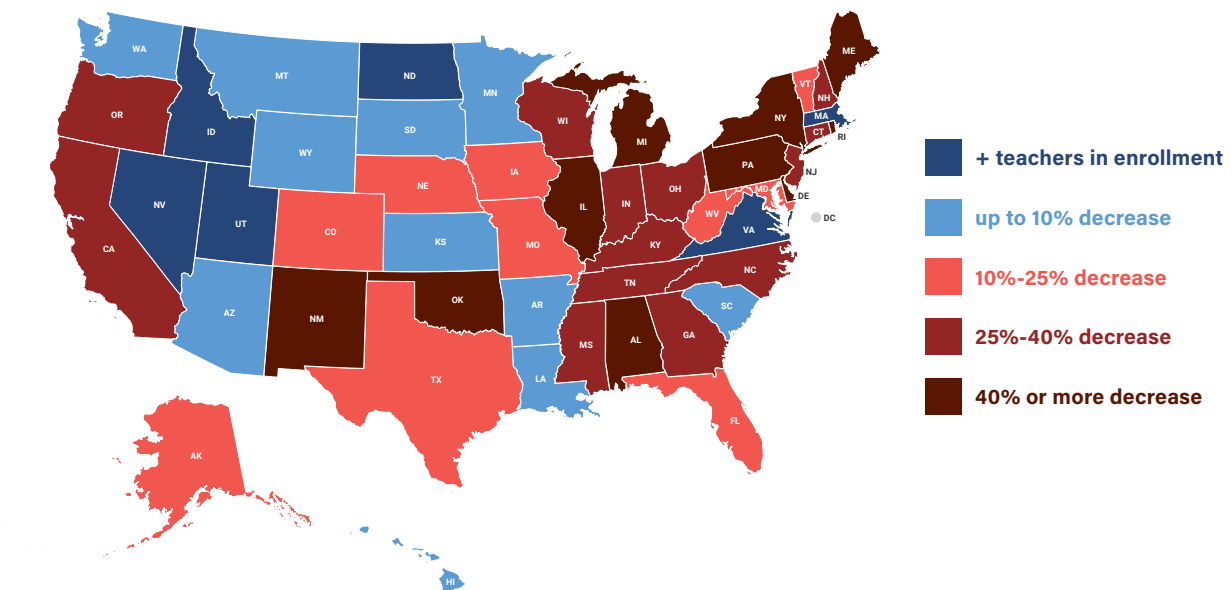
Between 2008-09 and 2016-17, 44 states reported decreases in enrollment at teacher preparation programs.<sup>12</sup> Twenty-three of those states, including Wisconsin, saw a decrease of at least 30% in enrollment, while only 6 states saw enrollment increases.<sup>13</sup> Since completion of an EPP is required prior to licensure, program enrollment directly impacts the overall supply of newly licensed teachers each year. Unlike EPP, K-12 student enrollment has continued to see increases, especially in elementary grades, thus further increasing the need for new teachers.<sup>14</sup>



In **Wisconsin**, not only is enrollment down, but many EPP completers do not ultimately receive a teaching license. In Wisconsin nearly 20% of completers did not receive a teaching license in 2017-18. This was an 8.2% decrease from 2011-12. While it is hard to pinpoint why EPP completers don't receive licenses this report identifies barriers that likely contribute to this phenomenon.

**Map 1: Teacher Preparation Enrollment Between 2008-09 and 2016-17**

Source: Tax Foundation (2020)



## Teacher and Field Shortages

In addition to enrollment declines in EPP, there has been a deficit of teachers nationwide. In 2018 there was a reported deficit of 112,000 teachers across the country.<sup>15</sup> However, this is misleading as teacher shortage reports are not just of individuals, but of properly licensed persons in specific fields (field shortages). To further explain, teacher licenses are not one size fits all, and vacant teaching positions cannot be filled by just any teacher. Long before obtaining licensure, teaching candidates must decide what grade level(s) and subject(s) they will teach. This determines which specialized license they will obtain in the future, which further limits what teaching positions a candidate may apply for as their licenses must match the grades/subject of

the position. For example, a 9th grade mathematics teacher could not teach 8th grade mathematics course without adding an additional endorsement to their license.\* If a school district cannot hire a teacher with the proper license (a very common occurrence) they may hire a teacher under a limited license. But this ultimately increases the effect of the shortage due to the shortened expiration date of limited licenses and the need to still hire a fully licensed teacher for the position.

States like California, Michigan, Nebraska, Arizona, Washington, Nevada, and others report severe field shortages.† The most common teaching field shortages are in mathematics, science, and special education, but many other shortage areas exist. The following table lists the teaching field shortages Wisconsin has experienced since 2006-07.‡

**Table 1: Wisconsin Shortage Areas since 2006-07<sup>16</sup>**

Subject	Grades
Art	All Grades
Career and Technical Education (multiple disciplines)	All Grades
English as a Second Language (multiple disciplines)	All Grades
Reading	All Grades
Mathematics	All Grades
Science	All Grades
Special Education (multiple disciplines)	All Grades
World Languages	All Grades

\* If the teacher holds a secondary level mathematics license.

† For more information on teacher shortages see: Garcia, Emma et.al. 2019. "The teacher shortage is real, large and growing, and worse than we thought." Economic Policy Institute. <https://www.epi.org/publication/the-teacher-shortage-is-real-large-and-growing-and-worse-than-we-thought-the-first-report-in-the-perfect-storm-in-the-teacher-labor-market-series/>

‡ Appendix D contains a list of all state's field shortages.

## Districts Can't Fill Vacant Teaching Positions

As mentioned earlier, if a school district is unable to fill a vacant teaching position, they may hire a candidate with a limited license. In Wisconsin, over 10% of all licenses issued in 2020 were limited teaching credentials.\* In fact, between the two license types (Tiers I and II) that can be granted to “first time” license holders, almost 30% were limited licenses. Wisconsin is not the only state which relies on limited licenses to fill vacant teaching positions. A minimum 5-7% of all licensed teachers in Virginia, New York, Texas, Idaho, and Washington hold limited licenses.<sup>17</sup>

While the overall percentages seem small, they represent thousands of teachers including nearly 23,000 in Texas. Table 2 includes data from the top five states relying on limited licenses based on 2015-16 data.<sup>18</sup> The table includes the minimum number of teachers holding limited licenses, total

number of teachers in that state, and then the overall percentage of teachers relying on limited licenses. As explained earlier, the challenge with limited license holders is that it does not address the shortages in fields due to the lack of full licensure for the subjects. If a state believes that a teacher must be fully licensed in the subject area, then the high percentages of limited licensed teachers should be of concern.

## High Teacher Turnover

To add to an evidently unstable workforce, the teaching profession also sees high yearly turnover.<sup>19</sup> Teacher turnover accounts for the number of teachers moving jobs and leaving the profession (attrition). Although it could easily be assumed that much of teacher attrition is due to retirement, actually a significant percentage of turnover is seen among new teachers. When

**Table 2: Top States Relying on Limited Licenses 2015-16**

Rank	State	Min # of Teachers w/ Limited License	Teacher Workforce	Min% w/ Limited License
1st	Virginia	6,626	89,968	7.36%
2nd	New York	14,735	203,781	7.23%
3rd	Texas	22,791	342,257	6.66%
4th	Idaho	920	15,609	5.89%
5th	Washington	3,500	59,555	5.88%
11th	Wisconsin	1,969	58,376	3.37%

\* According to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, the state issued 8841 Lifetime licenses, 8800 Provisional licenses and nearly 2500 License by stipulation during 2020.

compared to other professions, it is evident that teacher attrition is higher than it should be. According to a report by Economic Policy Institute, within 5 years of graduating 30% of teachers leave the profession. To briefly compare this with another profession, nurses have a 19% attrition rate within the first five years.<sup>20</sup> Nationwide, 30% of teacher turnover in 2013 was prior to retirement age, and in Wisconsin approximately 50% of turnover in 2015 was prior to retirement age.<sup>21</sup> According to a recent NCTQ report, teachers with less than four years' experience are 40% more likely to leave the profession "than the average public-school teacher."<sup>22</sup>

And while all turnover is not bad, the cost of teacher turnover is burdensome on school districts. For example, filling one vacant teaching position costs approximately \$21,000 nationally and over \$15,000 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.<sup>23</sup> According to a report,<sup>24</sup> 5,370 teachers entered the workforce in 2013 and as noted above 30%, or 1,611, of those teachers left the profession within five years costing the state between \$24 million and \$34 million.\* Not only is this financially hard on schools, but it also hurts student outcomes—especially when a teachers leave mid-year.<sup>25</sup>



In general **Wisconsin** tends to rank middle of the pack when compared to other state's turnover rates. For instance, Southwestern states, Arizona, Texas, and New Mexico see the highest teacher turnover of over 25% while Wisconsin stays close to the national average of 16%.<sup>26</sup> Ideally states should work to lower their turnover rates closer to 10%, reflecting states like New Jersey, New York, Utah, and West Virginia, among other Northeastern and Western states.<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately, comprehensive reporting of these numbers is hard to find as most states do not consistently report turnover or attrition rates--data which could be very helpful to state leaders and policymakers.

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\* The cost of filling a vacant teaching position includes the recruitment and training costs incurred by the school district. One way to calculate the cost is to use the Milwaukee average cost for replacing a teacher - \$15,000 x 1611 = \$24,164,000. Another way to calculate the cost is to use the national average cost for replacing a teacher - \$21,000 x 1611 = \$33,831,000.



# **How to Become a Teacher**



## Traditional Path to Licensure

Now that we have established the current state of the teacher workforce, let's discuss what is required to become a licensed teacher. Unfortunately, as previously mentioned, the teaching profession is the most regulated profession in the U.S. and licensing requires years of preparation and experience. Using the traditional pathway to licensure, a candidate should expect at least four years of preparation and additional time for teacher licensing assessments and application processing time.

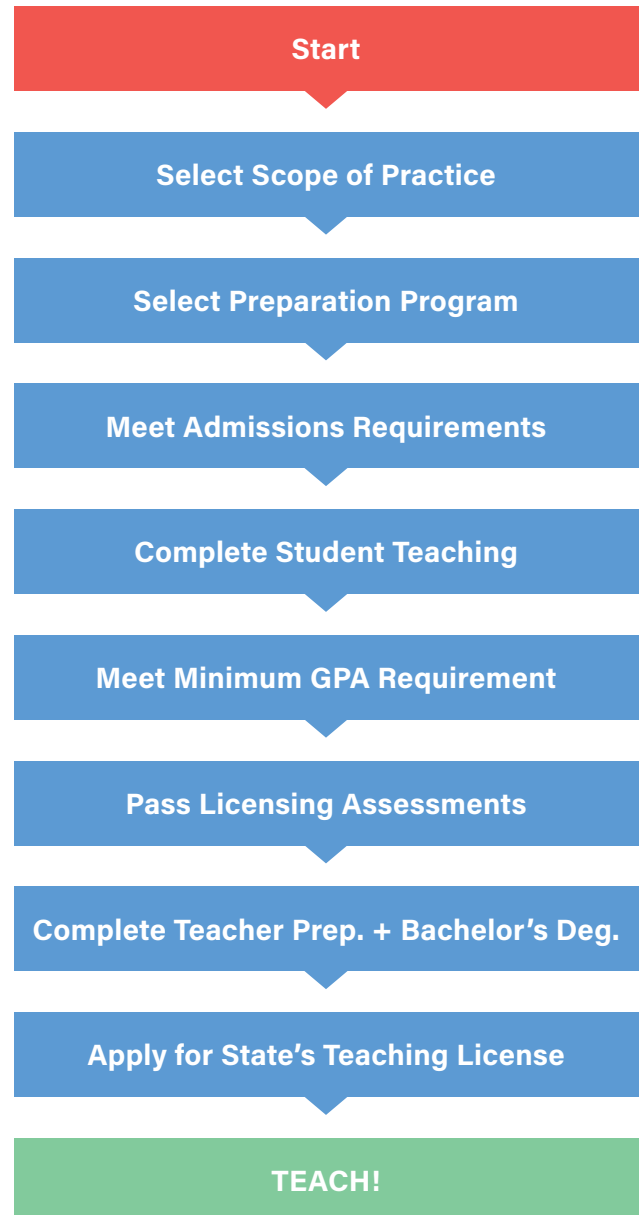
### STEP 1: SELECT SCOPE OF PRACTICE

Obtaining a teaching license is not easy and takes precise planning, execution and investment. The first and most important step in the process is selecting a scope of practice (SOP).

This step is vital as it determines much of the candidates' following steps. For instance, state licensing standards may require specific coursework, assessments, and student teaching requirements pertaining to their intended SOP. Once a candidate has completed the EPP they are able to add to their scope of practice by adding an endorsement; however, the process may be cumbersome and usually requires additional education and/or assessments.\* This means that a student wanting to become a teacher must know their intended SOP prior to applying for their EPP. Then to change their mind, or add to their SOP, the student will need to add an endorsement, requiring more money and time.

Overall, scopes of practice and endorsement requirements vary greatly by state, making it even more difficult for teachers to move between states.

**Figure 1: Steps to Teaching: Traditional Pathway**



\* It is worth noting that language and terms used for endorsement areas are different between PI 34, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's website and in DPI's annual report such as the "2019 Educator Preparation Programs Annual Report." Inconsistent, not incorrect, language is used quite often in licensing-relating documents; especially when discussing endorsement areas.

**Table 3: Wisconsin's Scopes of Practices<sup>28</sup>**

<b>Content-Area/Subject</b>	<b>Grade Range</b>
Early Childhood - Regular Education	Birth-3
Early Childhood - Special Education	Birth-3
Elementary and Middle School	K-9
Elementary and Middle School	4-12
English and Language Arts	4-12
Mathematics	4-12
Computer Science	4-12
Science	4-12
Social Studies	4-12
Cross-categorical Special Education	K-12
Agriculture Education	PK-12
Art	PK-12
Business Education	PK-12
Dance	PK-12
Deaf or Hard of Hearing	PK-12
Family and Consumer Education	PK-12
English as Second Language	K-12
French	PK-12
German	PK-12
Latin	PK-12
Russian	PK-12
Spanish	PK-12
Other foreign languages	PK-12
Health	PK-12
Marketing Education - PK-12	PK-12
Music - PK-12	PK-12
Physical Education	PK-12
Speech and Language Pathology	PK-12
Technology Education	PK-12
Theatre	PK-12
Visual Impairment	PK-12
Instructional Library Media Specialist	PK-12

## STEP 2: SELECT EDUCATOR PREPARATION PROGRAM

With their selected SOP in mind, a candidate should then look for a state-approved preparation program (EPP). Selecting a preparation program is not as simple as finding any institution with a teaching program. In order to complete proper preparation, a candidate must select a program which has the appropriate preparation type for their future SOP. For instance, candidates looking to teach students with special needs should select a program specific to special education. Again, this process requires immense foresight and confidence by a student before even completing their education. To change their SOP, a student may have to attend a completely different school to access the appropriate preparation program.

**Table 4: Teacher Preparation Types**

Early Childhood Preparation
Early Childhood Special Education
Elementary Preparation
Middle Preparation
Secondary Preparation
K-12 Preparation
K-12 Special Education

**Table 5: Approved EPP's in Wisconsin<sup>29</sup>**

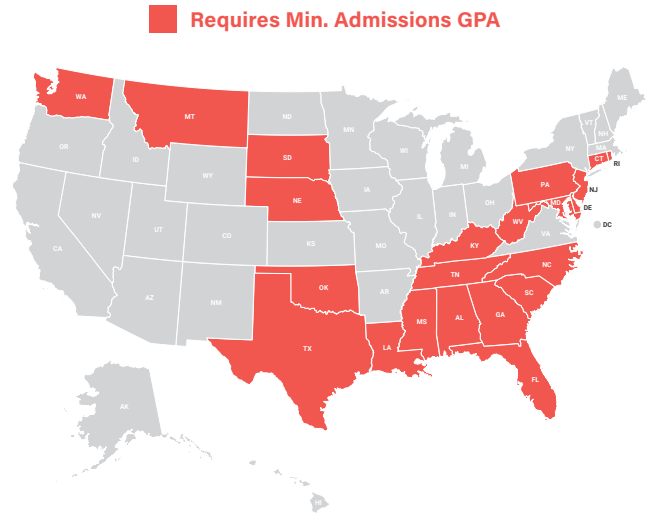
Alverno College
Beloit College
CESA 1, 6, 7
Cardinal Stritch University
Carroll University
Carthage College
Concordia University
Edgewood College
Lakeland University
Lawrence
MTEC
Maranatha Baptist
Marian University
Marquette University
Mount Mary University
NORDA, Inc. Project Teaching
Northland College
Ripon
Silver Lake College
St. Norbert College
UW- System
Viterbo University
Wisconsin Lutheran
educate-WI

### STEP 3: MEET ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS

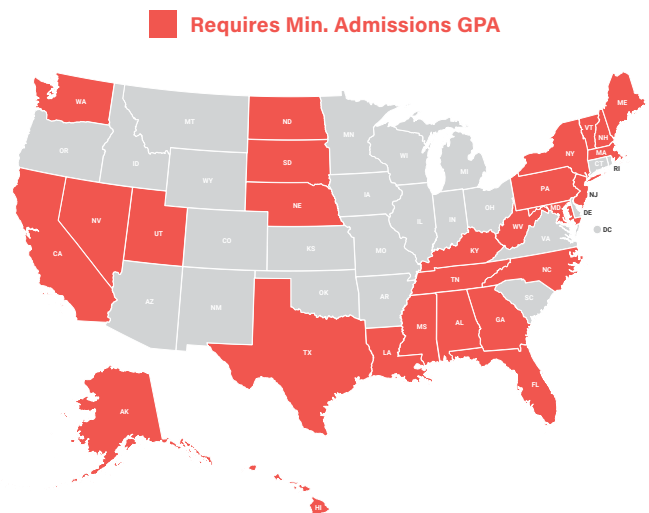
Once a program has been selected and the candidate sends over their transcripts, the school will then determine if the application meets the prerequisite admission requirements such as minimum high school GPA. Currently, 21 states require a minimum GPA ranging from 2.25 to 3.0. In rare cases this requirement can be waived if ACT, SAT, or GRE score permits. It is worth noting that although a state may not require a minimum GPA, a preparation program may still choose this requirement. For example, University of Wisconsin-Madison requires a minimum 2.5 GPA for admission into their School of Education.

Additionally, 25 states, not including Wisconsin, also require candidates to pass a basic skills assessment prior to admission. Basic skills assessments look at a teacher's general knowledge in reading, writing, and mathematics. Although half of states still require this assessment, it has become less popular with more states removing the requirement each year.\*

**Map 2: State Requires Minimum GPA for Admissions into Teacher Preparation**



**Map 3: State Requires Basic Skills Assessment**



**Wisconsin** does not have an admissions GPA requirement and permanently removed the basic skills requirement in 2018.

\* List of all states requiring basic skills in appendix C.

## STEP 4: COMPLETE STUDENT TEACHING EXPERIENCE

A key aspect of teacher preparation is student teaching or clinical experience. All states require a minimum student teaching period. This is typically equal to one semester, but there are programs, such as in New Jersey and New York, which require a full year of student teaching experience.\* Clinical experience may include observation experience, prior to student teaching. Observation allows teaching candidates to learn by observing a licensed teacher in a learning setting. Requirements for student teaching vary by state but some states offer alternate pathways to complete these requirements. This could include allowing non-teaching career experience to count towards teaching experience—depending on the specific scope of practice.

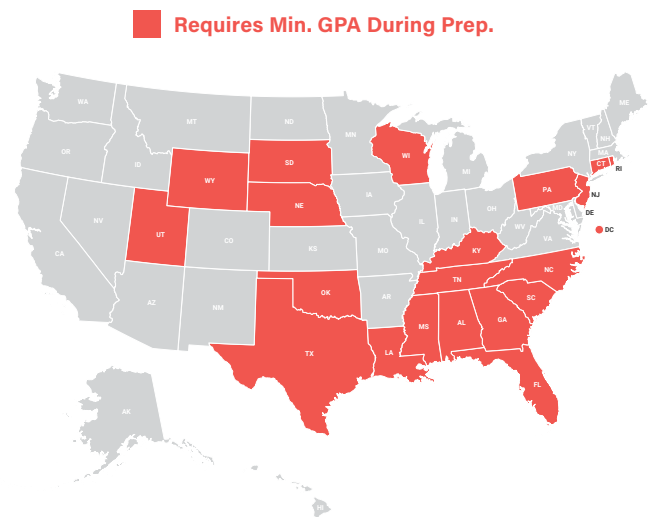


**Wisconsin** student teaching requirements include pre-student teaching and student teaching. Pre-student teaching is completed prior to student teaching and is done under supervision, in multiple learning settings, and results in at least two written evaluations. Student teaching must then take place in multiple learning settings but is not done under direct supervision and is full time.<sup>30</sup> Both of these requirements come before a student has graduated from a program.

## STEP 5: COMPLETE PREPARATION PROGRAM

Preparation requirements are different from state-to-state and program-to-program. However, the general framework is similar across the board. Each state's laws outline the program requirements such as credit hours, coursework, student teaching, assessment requirements, and any preparation GPA requirements for graduation. GPA requirements may pertain specifically to core teaching courses or to the candidate's overall graduating GPA. Some states choose a more laissez faire approach and set fewer specific requirements for programs, while other states detail the exact courses needed for each SOP. States such as Alabama, Colorado, Florida, and Michigan† set specific

**Map 4: State Requires Minimum GPA During Preparation**



\* For example, Niagara University requirements include a full year of student teaching. [https://www.nj.com/education/2015/11/nj-to-require-more-classroom-time-for-student-teach.html#incart\\_river\\_home](https://www.nj.com/education/2015/11/nj-to-require-more-classroom-time-for-student-teach.html#incart_river_home)  
<https://www.niagara.edu/teacher-education#:~:text=With%20the%20One-Year%20Teaching%20Program%2C%20candidates%20are%20eligible,the%20weekend%2C%20in%20the%20evenings%2C%20and%20even%20online>

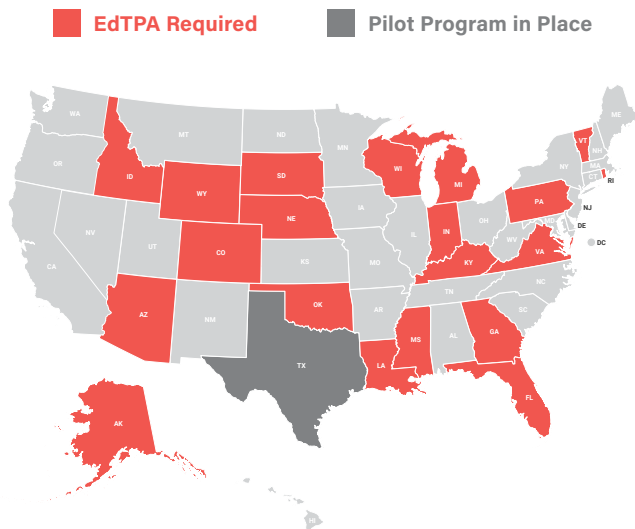
† List not comprehensive



credit-hour requirements for candidates, and New York, Arizona, Idaho, Iowa, and Missouri\* specify the exact courses required, according to an individual's SOP. Currently 20 states and D.C. (Map 4) specifically require candidates to maintain a minimum GPA during preparation in order to obtain a license.

Another requirement many states maintain is passage of the edTPA. The edTPA, which assesses a student's content knowledge as well as necessary skills for teaching in the classroom, is currently required by 20 states, including Wisconsin and Washington D.C.<sup>31</sup> This assessment may be required by the program but not necessarily by the state.

**Map 5: State Requires edTPA**



Source: [www.edtpa.aacte.org/state-policy](http://www.edtpa.aacte.org/state-policy)



In **Wisconsin** nearly 93% of EPP completers graduated from a traditional (non-alternative) program.<sup>32</sup> During preparation, candidates are required to maintain a minimum 3.0 GPA or pass content assessments to meet the state's content knowledge requirements. Fortunately, candidates are no longer required to pass the edTPA during preparation, as this requirement was permanently removed in 2020.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, the state does not specify coursework or credit requirements for candidates during preparation.

## STEP 6: PASS APPROPRIATE LICENSING ASSESSMENTS

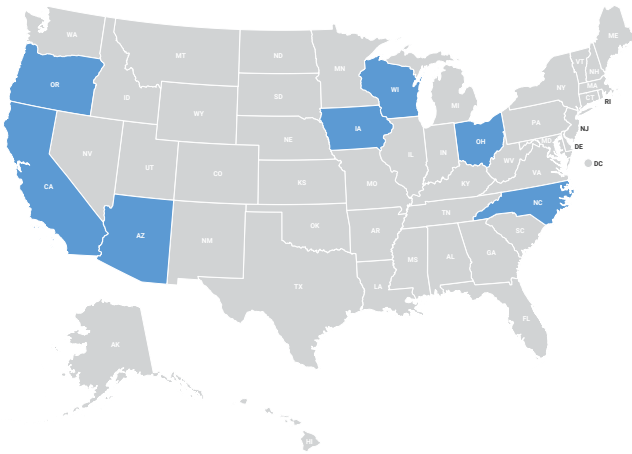
Once a student has completed teacher preparation and student teaching, they must then pass the appropriate licensing assessments. Each state requires different assessments and likely will differentiate assessment requirements based on the SOP. Post-preparation assessments typically include content knowledge assessments and reading assessments. Currently, the science of reading assessment is required by 40 states, including Wisconsin.<sup>34</sup> And forty-three states require all teachers to take a content assessment, while only eight states offer an alternative measure or do not require this assessment.<sup>†</sup> Alternative measures for assessing content

\* List not comprehensive

† Only Wyoming does not require this assessment. All other states have an alternative measure than can be used.

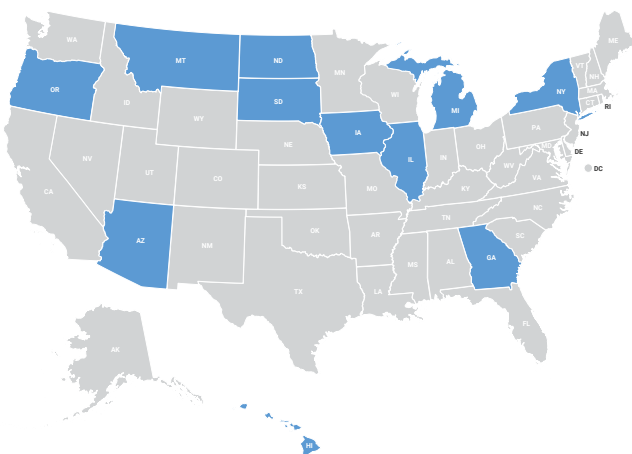
**Map 6: State DOES NOT Require Content Assessment for All Candidates**

**Content Assessment NOT required for ALL teachers**



### Map 7: State DOES NOT Require Reading Assessment

### State DOES NOT Require Reading Assessment



knowledge, such as meeting a minimum GPA, help remove a large licensing barrier created by assessments. If a candidate's SOP includes multiple subjects, they are required to pass a content assessment for each subject. Map 6 shows the states which offer alternative ways to complete content knowledge requirements other than passing content assessments. Map 7 shows states which do not require a reading assessment.



**Wisconsin** requires candidates to either take a content assessment for each subject taught or meet a minimum 3.0 GPA in all content-area courses. Wisconsin requires a reading assessment called the Foundations of Reading Test (FORT).

First-time passage rate on Wisconsin's reading exam, FORT, was only 63% in 2017-2018 and even with multiple-attempt passage rates included were less than 70%. During the same year, only 37.5% of candidates in Wisconsin passed the Praxis II Mathematics on first attempt and only 45.3% passed after multiple attempts. Even with subjects like Art only 55.6% of candidates passed the Praxis II Art content knowledge assessment on first attempt and only 60.9% of candidates passed after multiple attempts.<sup>35</sup> Failure to pass these tests means that a student who has completed an EPP and the requirements, including student teaching and GPA requirements, cannot receive a state license.

## STEP 7: APPLY FOR TEACHING CREDENTIAL

Once teacher preparation is complete and all required assessments for either a limited or full license are passed, a prospective teacher can apply for the proper teaching credential. It is important that a teacher apply for the proper license to prevent any processing delays. Application processing times vary by state.



Application fees in **Wisconsin** range from \$100-\$175 depending on the license. At this time Wisconsin estimates 6-8 weeks for in-state applications and 12-16 weeks for out-of-state. Once the candidate's completed application is processed, they are granted a teaching license and can officially teach.

## STEP 8: TEACH!

Once all licensing requirements have been met and a candidate has received their license, they are able to teach in the state public school system.



Currently there are over 57,000 teachers and 421 public school districts in **Wisconsin**. The average teacher salary is \$59,087<sup>36</sup> per year and the student teacher ratio is 14:1.<sup>37</sup>

## Overview of Wisconsin Teachers

over  
**57,000**  
public school  
teachers

**421**  
school districts

**\$59,087**  
average teacher salary

**14:1**  
student teacher ratio

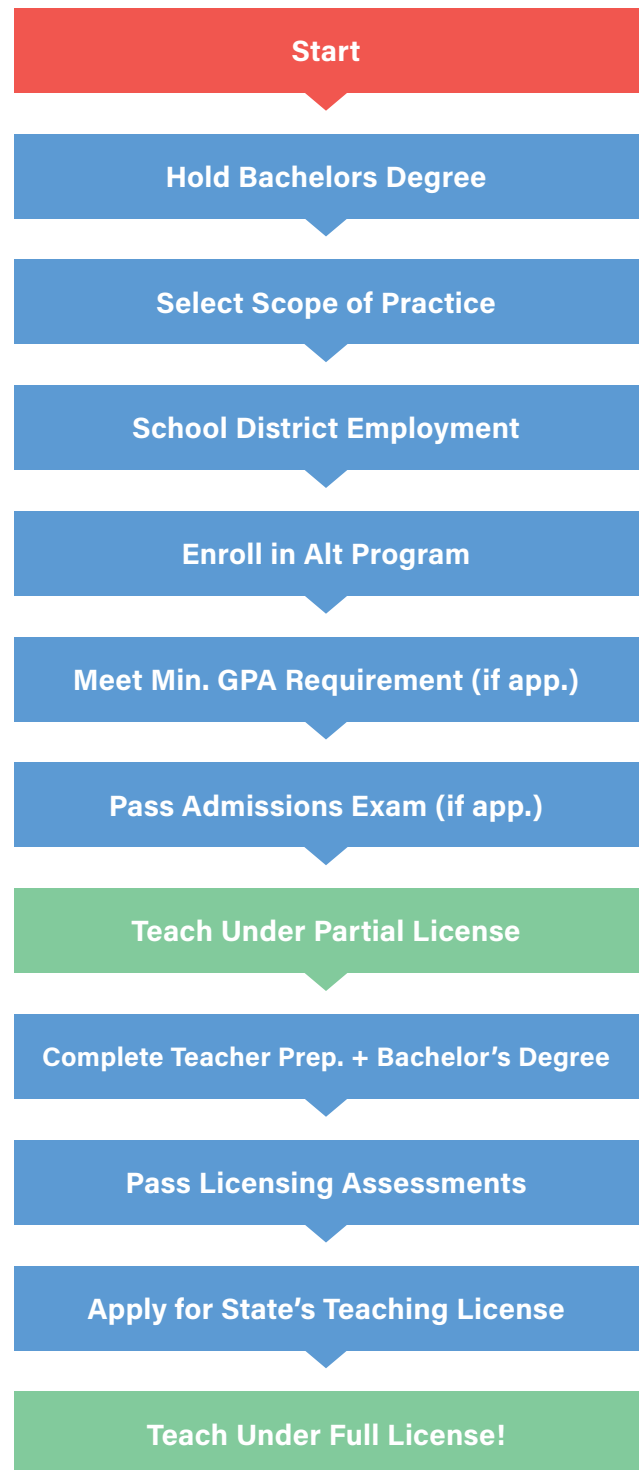
## Additional Pathways to Licensure

### ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS

Alternative programs or post-baccalaureate pathways help transition non-education degree holders into the teaching profession without requiring the candidate to complete an education degree. Alternative programs are common across the U.S. and prepare candidates in many of the same ways as a traditional program such as coursework, assessments, and student teaching experience. The general steps to licensure using an alternative route are as follows on the right.

Unlike traditional EPP programs, alternative programs require a bachelor's degree. This pathway often does not have the same state-mandated requirements such as a minimum GPA. Additionally, alternative programs may have specific goals, such as creating a teacher pipeline into specific low-income or shortage areas, which further differentiates the pathways. For example, Alverno College in Milwaukee offers a pipeline program for paraprofessionals to become teachers.<sup>38</sup> Both traditional and alternative programs may operate within an institution of higher-education, although many alternative programs also operate through non-profit and independent organizations such as Teach for America.

Figure 2: Steps to Teaching: Alternative Pathway





The approved alternative pathways in Wisconsin include:<sup>39</sup>

- **Post-Baccalaureate pathway**
- **College-based alternative programs** (for those who want to complete preparation within an institute of higher education.)
- **License by equivalency/reciprocity pathway** (for those who already hold an equivalent license out-of-state)
- **American Board** (for those who want a national certification—possibly for licensing advancement)
- **Out-of-state pathway** (for those who have completed preparation outside of Wisconsin)
- **Out-of-state alternative pathway** (for those who completed an alternative program outside of Wisconsin)

Alternative programs are offered through organizations such as:<sup>40</sup>

- **ACT! Program** (an affordable accelerated educator preparation program for those with a bachelor's degree)
- **Cooperative Education Service Agencies (CESA's) 1** (A proficiency-based educator preparation program)
- **Cooperative Education Service Agencies (CESA's) 6** (A residency- based program or a "jump-start" program)
- **eduCATE-Wi** (An alternative program for teaching candidates and teachers. The agency offers multiple types of programs depending on if one is new to teaching or looking to add an endorsement to their license.)

Alternative Programs are also offered through an institute of higher education:

- **The Milwaukee Teacher Education Center (MTEC)**
- **Alverno College**
- **Marquette University**
- **UW-System**



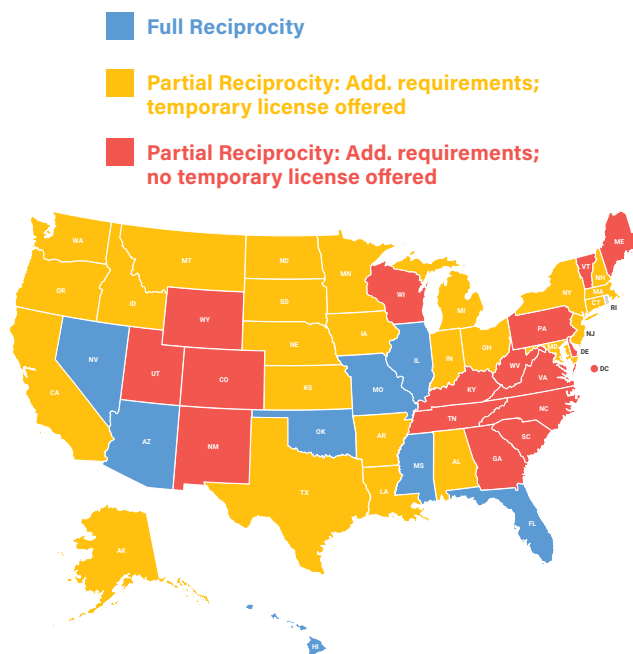
## OUT-OF-STATE PATHWAYS

Unfortunately, if a teacher wants to move from one state to another, it is not just as simple as applying for a new job. Teaching licenses are only valid in the state where their license is issued and usually cannot be transferred to another state without additional work. In fact, even if a candidate has ten years of teaching experience with a master's degree, there is no guarantee their license will transfer to another state without additional work or at all. So how do teachers obtain a new license when they move?

Out-of-state pathways can be classified in two categories: general out-of-state pathways and reciprocal pathways. Generally, out-of-state pathways are used for candidates new to teaching, but who have completed preparation. In this scenario, candidates have to complete additional assessments and coursework even though they have completed preparation requirements in their previous state. Reciprocal pathways, however, are used if a candidate already holds a full-teaching credential and is seeking a license out-of-state. Even in this scenario teachers will likely be forced to jump through hoops, such as submitting undergraduate transcripts even though they hold a valid teaching license.

The idea behind licensing reciprocity is that a license should easily transfer from one state to another. However, it rarely works this way. For the purposes of this report, we will refer to reciprocal licenses in two categories: full-reciprocity and partial-reciprocity. Currently only eight states allow teachers to fully exchange their license without additional requirements, while 42 states use partial-reciprocity. Since partial-reciprocity requires additional work, candidates cannot immediately work in their new state unless the state offers a limited license for out-of-state candidates.

Map 8: Licensing Reciprocity By State



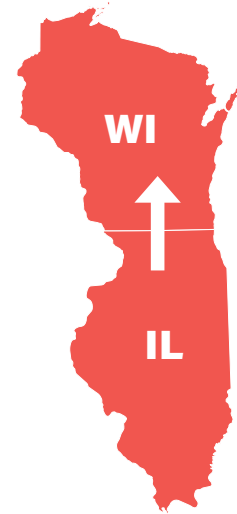
The process for receiving out-of-state licenses through either pathway can be tedious, time-consuming, with requirements varying depending on both where someone is moving from and to. In other words, transferring a license from Illinois to Wisconsin will look different than transferring a license from Wisconsin to Illinois.

An application may ask candidates to include information such as proof of coursework, teacher preparation, student teaching, and assessments completion. If the state requires specific courses or assessments during preparation, they will check for equivalent courses and assessments or even may require the candidate to complete those within their state. Once a candidate's applications are evaluated and approved, the state issues an appropriate license-based on its licensing standards. On the next page are two example scenarios of what transferring a license from one state to another may look like.

## SCENARIO 1: TEACHER MOVING LICENSE FROM ILLINOIS TO WISCONSIN

### Educator Profile:

- Moving from Illinois to Wisconsin
- Holds a Professional Educator License (5-year renewable)
- Has three years of experience of said license
- Passed required exams in Illinois (content and EdTPA)
- License is in “good standing”



### Requirements for WI Out-of-state pathway:

- Transcripts - w/ completion of proper courses and assessments
- Holds a valid teaching license
- Additional assessments if out-of-state assessments do not meet standards

### Reciprocal License Issues:

- Temporary License
- Valid for 1 year

Let's say an Illinois teacher wants to transfer their license to Wisconsin. The teacher (teacher A) has worked in Illinois for two years under their first-time license (initial license) and their license is in good standing. To hold their current licenses, the teacher completed all preparation and assessment requirements for the state of Illinois such as student teaching, coursework, and licensing assessments. To transfer their license to Wisconsin using the license-by-reciprocity pathway, the candidate must have held their license for a minimum of one year and be in good standing in Illinois. Since teacher A has worked for three years and is in good standing, Wisconsin should issue a Tier II license to teacher A. Applications for out-of-state licenses may take 12-16 weeks to process.\*

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\* It should be noted that Wisconsin Administrative Code (PI 34) has not listed the license by reciprocity as a Tier I license. However, this is incorrect and currently the process is being amended. As a result, there is no current statute or rule that directly details the requirements for receiving a Tier II license by reciprocity. However, the Department of Public Instruction's (DPI) website correctly lists this license as Tier II and details the basic requirements for applying for this license. According to DPI's website there are no additional requirements like coursework or assessments for a reciprocal license.

## SCENARIO 2: TEACHER MOVING FROM WISCONSIN TO TEXAS

### Educator Profile:

- Moving from Wisconsin to Texas
- Holds a Tier II Provisional License Educator License (3-year renewable)
- Has four years of experience
- Passed required exams in Wisconsin for licensure (content and EdTPA)
- License is in “good standing”



### Requirements for TX License by Reciprocity:

- Holds a valid teaching license
- Has taught out of state for one year or within Wisconsin for one year

### Reciprocal License Issues:

- Tier II License by Reciprocity
- Valid for three years

In Scenario 2, a teacher from Wisconsin wants to move and transfer their license to Texas. The teacher holds a valid Tier II Provisional 3-year license in good standing and has four years of experience teaching. To “transfer” their five-year license they would apply for a one-year temporary license. Texas’s out-of-state pathway does not operate as a true reciprocal pathway. Licenses issued are not equivalent to ones held in the prior state unless the candidate previously held a temporary license. This pathway requires proof of a standard out-of-state license, transcripts from college(s), confirmation that out-of-state assessments fulfill Texas requirements, or if they don’t, completion of a Texas assessment.

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Through these two scenarios we can see that licensing reciprocity is not as easy as just transferring a license to another state. Each state has different requirements that a candidate must meet to transfer their license, and most states will require additional work prior to full licensure or only issue temporary licenses. To transfer licenses, 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—for many, this process may be too complicated and burdensome, resulting in teachers leaving the workforce. Moving from one state to another should not be so hard and states like Wisconsin have an incentive to attract teachers from other states to work here. Full reciprocity or license recognition should be offered in all 50 states as long as the person holds a valid license.



# Teaching Credentials

## License Types

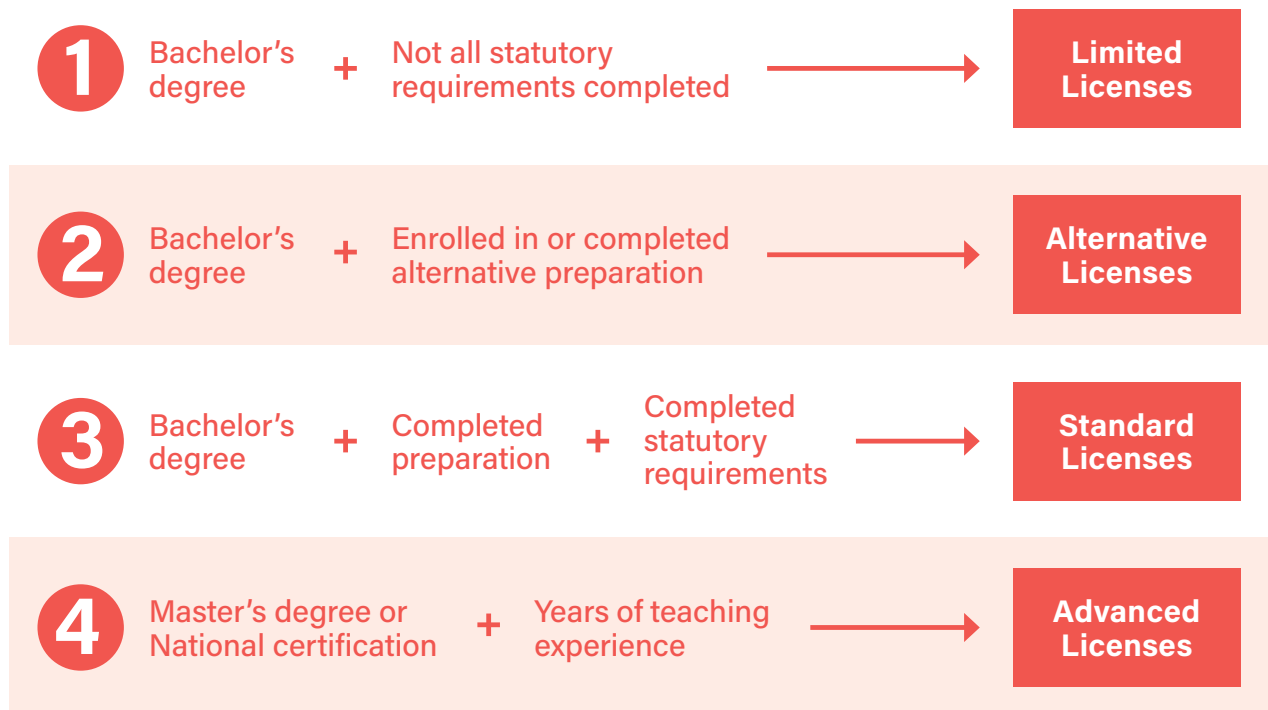
Now that we have discussed how to become a teacher, it is important to understand licensing and licensing models. License names vary by state, but can be broken into four categories based on their required degree level, preparation type required, and overall experience needed. In order from most restricted license to least restricted they are as follows:\*

- Limited licenses
- Alternative licenses
- Standard licenses
- Advanced licenses

## Licensing Models†

Licensing models can be categorized by two standard systems: 1) tiered, or 2) individual or non-tiered. The most common educator licensing model is a tiered system. Currently, 31 states use this system, with more states transitioning to tiered systems each year. The process for moving “up the ranks” for teachers can sometimes be a bureaucratic, confusing nightmare. Tiered systems endeavor to create a clear process by which teachers can advance up the career ladder to better, and higher-paying ranks. In a tiered system, teachers may start with a first-time license or limited license and work their way to standard or advanced licenses.

Tiered systems vary from state to state, ranging from two-tiered systems to four-tiered systems.



\* Glossary contains definitions for license types.

† Appendix A includes all states licensing system and licenses.





Table 6: List of Tier I Licenses Offered in Wisconsin

Tier I	Eligibility	Renewal	Advancement Requirements
<b>1-year License with Stipulation</b>	<p>Does not meet all the state's requirements for a Tier II, III, or IV license.</p> <p>Completed coursework through an approved program.</p> <p>Completion of out-of-state program without meeting in-state requirements, school district needs.</p>	<p>Renewable if:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Enrolled in a teacher program and completed at least six semester credits.</li> <li>2. Completed all coursework or its equivalent.</li> <li>3. If 1 &amp; 2 are not met, district administrator submits a written plan to superintendent.</li> </ol>	N/A
<b>3-year License with Stipulations</b>	<p>For special education only.</p> <p>Hold a valid Tier II, III, IV teaching licenses.</p> <p>One-year teaching experience.</p>	Nonrenewable	<p>Tier II or III licenses issued if a written request is submitted for endorsement in the new subject area or grade level of the Tier II or III license, or if the applicant is applying for a Tier III license and has six semester hours completed.</p>
<b>3 year - Guest Teacher License</b>	<p>Must hold bachelor's degree.</p> <p>Completed teacher preparation outside of U.S. or have school district agree to mentorship during license.</p>	Renewable-by request of employer only.	N/A
<b>5 year - Charter School Licensure</b>	<p>Completion of a major or minor at an accredited institution in the subject area of the license.</p> <p>Passing a content knowledge examination in the subject area of the license.</p> <p>Passing an assessment process approved by the state superintendent in the subject area of the license.</p>	Renewable	N/A
<b>3 year - License by Experience for Technical and Vocational Education Subjects</b>	<p>Offer of employment.</p> <p>Development training during the term of the initial license, as determined by that school board.</p>	No	<p>Upon expiration and after completed professional development plan.</p> <p>5-year renewable professional license by experienced granted.</p>
<b>5 year - License by Reciprocity</b>	<p>Hold valid license in another state.</p> <p>Taught for at least one year.</p>	Renewable	<p>Advancement determined by license granted &amp; licensed granted by equivalency.</p>

## Post-Licensure Requirements

## MENTORSHIP REQUIREMENTS

license holders. The framework for mentorship generally included pairing new teachers with one or more experienced teachers for a set number of years. This aspect of licensure functions to support teachers during their initial years while effectively continuing preparation. With the current state of the teacher workforce, mentorship programs may be a prudent step towards keeping new teachers in the classroom.\* New York City has been touted as having one of the best teacher mentorship programs in the country. Appendix D includes a list of all states with mentorship programs and the number of years required.

**Mentorship required**

States where mentorship is required (blue): WA, OR, ID, UT, CO, NM, AZ, TX, OK, KS, NE, MN, IA, MO, AR, LA, MS, AL, GA, FL, HI, ME, NH, VT, NY, PA, OH, IN, KY, TN, NC, SC, VA, MD, DE, NJ, RI, CT, MA, VT, NH, ME.

States where mentorship is not required (gray): MT, WY, ND, SD, WI, MI, IL, PA, OH, IN, KY, TN, NC, SC, VA, MD, DE, NJ, RI, CT, MA, VT, NH, ME.

DC

At some point all teachers will go through the process of licensing renewal. Renewal requirements apply to all licenses with an expiration date and require teachers to

\* See “Public School Teacher Attrition and Mobility in the First Five Years: Resulting from the first through five eaves of the 2007-08 beginning teacher longitudinal study,” National Center for Educator Statistics <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2015/2015337.pdf>

complete the state's professional development requirements and pay an associated fee. The actual requirements vary by state, licensing structure, and license type, but usually include completing a professional development plan or working effectively under a license for a set period of time. Professional development may include coursework or programing which relates to the scope of practice. In a tiered licensing system, an educator's professional development is done within the classroom. However, in a non-tiered system teachers will likely have to complete requirements outside of the classroom. Professional development courses completed outside the classroom often have associated fees, which a teacher is expected to pay in most circumstances.



Licensing renewal in **Wisconsin** requires three years or six semesters of experience under a Wisconsin license. However, this only applies to Tier I and Tier II licenses. In recent years Wisconsin, removed its Tier III and IV renewal requirements, instead making these two licenses permanent as long as the teacher is in good standing. This change removes an unnecessary barrier in licensing by allowing teachers to work under their license without having to prove to the state every few years that they are a good teacher. In other words, the renewal process operates under the assumption that teachers need to prove their worth even though they have completed numerous licensing preparation requirements and have experience teaching.

## LICENSING ADVANCEMENT

In most cases, teachers have the opportunity to advance their license. Licensing advancement, similar to licensing renewal, requires completion of professional development which could include experience under current license, coursework, programing, and even additional preparation through a program/institution if advanced license requires a masters or national certification such as National Board Certification (NBC).\*



In **Wisconsin** the requirement to advance from a Tier II Provisional (first standard license) to a Tier III Lifetime License is three years or six semesters of experience under a Tier II license in Wisconsin. Wisconsin also offers a Tier IV Master Level licenses which requires completion of NBC.

\* For more information on NBC, National Board Certification. [accessed April 2021] *National Board for Professional Teaching Standards*. NA <http://www.nbpts.org/national-board-certification/>

A background image showing two students, a woman on the left and a man on the right, sitting at a table in a library or study area. They are both looking down at books or papers. The room has bookshelves filled with books in the background. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent red filter.

# **Conclusion**

Unfortunately, the very noble goal of becoming a public-school teacher can be hindered by the daunting list of requirements and “to do’s” to get into the classroom. Every state creates their own teacher preparation and professional standards which are implemented by state law.

Teacher licensing is not simple. There are steps teachers must diligently take before they start their teaching program, and in order to stay in the classroom, teachers must renew their license in the future. Unfortunately, all of these requirements to get “quality” teachers in the classroom have only kept many from entering or wanting to become teachers. This narrative is not new but must be changed. The current system for licensing teachers, although different from state to state, is overly burdensome. What can be done to improve the process?

The first goal should be more comprehensive data on teacher shortages. Teacher shortages have prevailed for over a decade, yet there is little data available each year showing a state’s available teaching positions, both unfilled and filled. Unfortunately, without comprehensive data, there is little that can be done to solve continual shortages. An easy solution would be for the individual states to annually report open teaching positions, teacher turnover, and attrition.

In order to ease the process of getting teachers into the classroom, standardized licensing tests should be reduced or eliminated because they do not affect student outcomes and only hurt a teacher’s chance of entering a classroom, and likely contribute to our shortage of fully licensed teachers. This recommendation would

not result in less qualified teachers – to even get to the licensure test stage requires immense dedication, investment and passing several assessments. Additionally, this change would not prevent school districts from choosing to implement hiring standards of their own if they wish to do so, even if a state no longer requires specific assessments.

Licensing reform is also critical. The number of licenses should be streamlined, and the length of time before renewal should be expanded. Most licenses expire within five years, requiring teachers to complete the state’s renewal requirements to continue working under said license. Lifetime licenses, like those issued in Wisconsin, do not expire, which may incentivize lower-level license holders to advance their license and therefore their career. Additional renewal requirements may contribute to teacher turnover as teachers leave the profession rather than continually working and paying to renew a license. Moreover, licensing reciprocity should be as simple as transferring a teaching license from one state to another, with no additional hoops to jump through.

Teachers must feel prepared for the classroom. Instead of spending time jumping through administrative hoops, states can invest in support systems that help individuals prepare for the classroom. Student teaching and additional support such as mentorship may help teachers feel more prepared and lead to less attrition. Although student teaching is not a silver bullet, there are many who advocate for longer student teaching as a means to better prepare teachers.\*

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\* For more information on the importance of student teaching, see report by National Council on Teacher Quality, July 2011, [https://www.nctq.org/dmsView/Student\\_Teaching\\_United\\_States\\_NCTQ\\_Report](https://www.nctq.org/dmsView/Student_Teaching_United_States_NCTQ_Report)  
For examples of programs and states with the longest student teaching requirements, see article from 2015 [https://www.nj.com/education/2015/11/nj\\_to\\_require\\_more\\_classroom\\_time\\_for\\_student\\_teach.html#incart\\_river\\_home](https://www.nj.com/education/2015/11/nj_to_require_more_classroom_time_for_student_teach.html#incart_river_home)



Despite these immense barriers, there are schools implementing innovative programs to help individuals gain access to the classroom to teach. For example, Concordia University partners with several Wisconsin public charter schools and school districts to create a pathway for parent educational assistants to become teachers. These programs are successful and the state should find ways to encourage and increase these innovative models.

Many reforms, programs, and grants have been implemented throughout the country in an effort to create a better teacher outline, yet we continue to see declining enrollment into teacher preparation programs and more and more school districts relying on partially licensed teachers, or not being able to fill their vacant teaching positions. This will continue to be the norm unless measures are taken to change the requirements for getting teachers in the classroom.





# Glossary

**Advanced Teaching License:** A license which is above a state’s standard teaching license. This license may require specified years of teaching experience, additional education, national certification or an advanced degree. The length of this license varies but typically ranges from 5-10 years.

**Alternative License:** A license received through alternative means such as through alternative program and which is not a standard teaching license granted in the state. Example: Military spouse teaching license, Career and technical education license, or transition to teaching licenses.

**Alternative Pathway:** A state approved route to licensure outside the traditional baccalaureate route. Alternative pathways are usually post-baccalaureate programs requiring a bachelor’s degree for admission. Alternative programs may result in a teaching credential or even an advanced degree such as a masters. Typical program length ranges from one to two years.

**Basic Skills Assessment:** A licensing assessment which measures a candidate’s knowledge of reading, writing and mathematics—core teaching subjects. This assessment is required in many states prior to licensure.

**Content Knowledge Assessment:** A licensure exam which assesses the candidate’s knowledge of a specific subject area or content area such as mathematics or science. Teaching candidates may be required to take multiple of these assessments prior to licensure—depending on the scope of the license sought.

**Education Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA):** A licensing assessment which measures content knowledge during educator preparation.

**Education Preparation Program (EPP):** Programs designed to complete all state educator licensing requirements. Programs should be approved by the state and follow all state statutes regarding framework and programs requirements.

**Endorsements:** Typically refers to an additional scope of practice added to a license post-licensure. This term can also be used when referring a licenses’ scope of practice—depending on the state. \*In this report the former definition will be used to define endorsement.

**Field Shortage:** A shortage of teachers holding licenses in specific grade(s) and subject(s) areas (scopes of practice) such as secondary mathematics, special education or English as a second language.

**Initial License:** Refers to a first-time teaching license. This license identifies a teacher as having limited experience teaching or limited experience teaching in the state. This license type requires full completion of a teacher preparation program but may not require completion of all state assessments.

**Licensing Advancement:** Refers to the process by which teacher progresses from a lower-level license to a higher-level license. For example, a teacher may advance from an initial license to the state’s standard teaching license or from a standard license to an advanced license.

**License by Equivalency:** An out-of-state license granted based on holding a similar type of license in a different state or country.

**Licensure by Experience:** also referred to as a career and technical education (CTE) licenses are granted to candidates who do NOT hold a teaching license, but have career experience within a specific subject field. This type of license or pathway to licensure is usually only offered for specific teaching fields such as shortage areas or career and technical education fields like engineering Experience-based licenses may only be provisional teaching licenses, but may lead to the states standard license once all preparation requirements are met.

**License by Reciprocity:** The process of exchanging or obtaining a license in a new state without additional requirements. Full reciprocity allows for transfer of a license from any state without additional requirements. Partial Reciprocity requires the applicant to meet additional requirements before obtaining a license.

**License by Stipulation:** A license issued under abnormal circumstances and which does not hold full license authority (e.g. Limited license.) This license is issued before all state licensing requirements are completed.

**Limited License:** Any license which gives partial (limited) teaching authority. This license is often called an emergency license or a provisional license. This license indicates the holder has not met all licensing requirements. Teachers who hold this license must maintain employment in the same school district and may not move to another district without losing said license. This license may or may not be renewable and likely expires after one year or less.

**National Association of State Director of Teaching Education (NASDTEC) Interstate Agreement:** A collection of all 50 states' out-of-state licensing requirements. This agreement helps facilitate teacher mobility across state lines. This agreement does not guarantee teacher licensing reciprocity.

**Out-of-State Pathway:** Are used if an applicant completed preparation out-of-state and may not hold a teaching credential or meet a state's reciprocal licensing requirements. This pathway may lead to a temporary or provisional license especially if one has not passed all state required licensure-assessments.

**Pathway:** State-approved route or steps to licensure (e.g., in-state pathway, out-of-state pathway, alternative pathway, military-spouse pathway, career and technical education pathway).

**Permanent Licenses:** A license which does not expire or require continued education to maintain. This license type is uncommon.

**Preparation Type:** EPPs offer different teaching program such as elementary education, secondary education, and special education. Each preparation type prepares a candidate for a specific age range or scope of practice.

**Provisional License:** A license held when a candidate has not completed all standard licensing requirements. Licensing requirements typically must be completed while holding a provisional license if candidate wants to advance above a provisional license. This license may or may not be renewable.

**Tiered Licensing:** Refers to a licensing model which ranks licenses from least experienced/lowest degree level to highest level of experience or degree level. This model provides a method for teachers to advance in their profession without leaving the classroom.

**Traditional Pathway:** A state's normal route to teacher licensure completed through a baccalaureate program. This route should take four-years and results in both a bachelor's degree and teaching credential if all assessments are completed post-graduation.

**Teach for American:** An alternative program that recruits and trains teachers to teach in low-income schools for a minimum of two years during their initial teaching years.

**Scope of Practice (SOP):** refers to both the subject and grade level(s) a teacher is licensed to teach. SOPs may be referred to as a certification area, designation, or even endorsement in some cases.

**Standard License:** A standard or professional license is the most common type of license. This license is offered to applicants who have completed all state requirements including a bachelor's degree and assessment requirements. This license type is usually valid for five years and is renewable an unlimited number of times.

**Shortage-Area Based Pathway:** This pathway is tailored to transitioning a career professional into teaching positions in field-shortage areas such as mathematics or special education. This license can also be referred to as a career and technical education license depending on the state.

A close-up, low-angle shot of a computer keyboard, focusing on the keys in the foreground. The image is heavily stylized with a solid red overlay, creating a monochromatic effect. The keys are visible as raised rectangular shapes, with some showing signs of wear and the underlying mechanism. The background is blurred, emphasizing the texture and depth of the keyboard keys.

# **Endnotes**



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330 East Kilbourn Ave.|Suite 725  
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