

January 2017

Delaware

Delaware, like most states, is increasingly focused on the quality of teacher preparation programs and the supply of well-prepared beginning teachers as key factors in student learning.

Delaware, in fact, won one of the first federal Race to the Top grants, which placed a premium on ensuring that teachers were highly effective. In response, Gov. Jack Markell and the Legislature in 2013 set new standards for teacher licensure and approval of education-preparation programs.

“We were hiring more and more educators,” says Shannon Holston, the deputy officer for educator preparation in the Teacher and Leader Effectiveness Branch of the Delaware Department of Education. “Having qualified novice educators is critical to the system as a whole. The state needed to play a more active role.”

The new law set entry and exit requirements for teacher-education programs and data-collection requirements for the programs and their graduates to allow for continuous improvement. In implementing the law, state officials have benefited from their participation in the Network for Transforming Educator Preparation (NTEP).



About NTEP

The Network for Transforming Educator Preparation is a network of states that are using policy levers identified in [Our Responsibility](#), [Our Promise](#)—specifically, licensure, program approval, and data collection, analysis, and reporting—to reinvent educator preparation.

These network states work with educators, preparation programs, institutions of higher education, non-profit and for-profit education providers, districts and schools to make substantive changes in the policy and practice of educator workforce preparation.

1 Raising the Bar for Teachers

The law set, for the first time, entry requirements for teacher-education programs. Teacher-candidates would have to have a 3.0 grade-point average, be in the top 50th percentile in grades, or score at the college-ready level on a test of general knowledge, such as the SAT.

These requirements did not affect most prospective teachers, because most students aspiring to the programs had already met the requirements, says Laura Glass, the director of the Delaware Center for Teacher Education at the University of Delaware.

However, the exit requirements represented a bigger shift. The law required prospective teachers to pass a performance assessment to demonstrate their readiness to teach. Under the statute, institutions of higher education could choose between the edTPA, developed by researchers at Stanford University, and the PPAT, developed by the Educational Testing Service. Most institutions chose the PPAT, according to Glass. The University of Delaware gave individual programs the option of choosing between the tests, and some chose edTPA.

The performance-assessment requirement has prompted changes in curriculum and instruction at teacher-education

institutions, notes Glass. In some cases, faculty members provided students with an opportunity to understand the rubric that is used to evaluate performance on the assessment. In addition, faculty members have examined the assessments and transformed their instruction to reflect what it expects teacher-candidates to know and be able to do. Glass notes that performance assessment emphasizes paying close attention to what a teacher-candidate's students are learning in their lessons and activities.

"This is a good way to make sure candidates are thinking about their impact on student learning, reflecting on that, and what instructional decisions are based on that," she says.

The state also ensured that the requirements applied to all teachers, including those certified in other states. This is significant in Delaware, where about half of all teachers come from out of state. Under the new policy, teachers who come from other states, or who advance through alternative routes, receive a one-year provisional certificate while they complete the new Delaware requirements.

The Role of the Network

Delaware officials credit NTEP with helping them move forward with implementing their ambitious policy agenda. For example, Georgia educators helped them with challenges in implementing performance assessments, and Louisiana and Massachusetts officials shared their experiences in developing new program approval processes.

The network meetings also provided the Delaware team with concentrated time to work on its own plans, says Glass. "There was a lot of team time," she says. "It's rare to have two and a half days to sit down with DOE to hammer through issues."

The network meetings also provided some concrete solutions. For example, one meeting featured a session on teacher diversity. Following the meeting, the human-resources director of a Delaware district contacted individuals from Boston University and Rowan University and formed a team to help them come up with plans to improve the recruitment and retention of teachers of color, says Holston. "Things that happen at NTEP do come back and make a difference in our districts," she says.

2 Asking More of Preparation Programs

The 2013 Delaware law also established a state-run approval process for educator preparation programs. Previously, the state had “outsourced” program approval to the national accrediting organization, then known as the National Council for Accrediting Teacher Education (NCATE), says Holston. “Before, as a state, if you were NCATE-approved, you were good to go,” she says.

Under the new policy, the state established a set of criteria all institutions must meet, and will review the data every two years; under the NCATE process, institutions were reviewed every seven years. “We thought that was too long,” Holston says. “Now we have a cycle of continuous program performance.”

The Delaware Department of Education released the first report on programs’ performance, known as the “scorecard,”

in 2015, in preliminary form. No consequences were attached to the program ratings, but some institutions of higher education expressed concerns about some of the indicators used to produce the ratings. In response, the department formed an advisory committee, made up of representatives of the institutions of higher education, school districts, and other stakeholders, to revise the scorecard.

The revised scorecard—which will count for programs—was released in November 2016. All committee members now agree that the scorecard holds institutions accountable for performance, and that the measures accurately reflect the quality of their programs, says Glass from the University of Delaware.

The academies will provide opportunities to recruit individuals into education as a profession, early college credit and field experiences. The teacher academies represent a particularly strong opportunity to recruit students from diverse backgrounds.

3 Using Data to Improve Program Effectiveness

The scorecard evaluates programs in six areas: recruitment, including the diversity of the candidate class; candidate performance, based on assessments, including the classroom-based assessment; placement, including teaching in high-needs schools; retention; graduates’ performance, based on evaluations and their students’ performance, and perceptions of graduates and supervisors. The graduates’ performance is weighted most heavily. The programs are then divided into four tiers; Tier 1 programs are outstanding, while Tier 4 schools are subject to intervention.

The primary goal of the rating system was to create public transparency and put in place incentives for institutions to improve their programs. “All programs should aspire to be Tier 1,” says Holston. “We’re hoping the system encourages programs to improve.”

At the same time, she says, the system could steer students to top-quality programs and encourage districts to look to them when hiring new teachers. Glass says the system has already sparked changes at the University of Delaware. Even

though the preliminary report carried no stakes, the university examined the data and determined it needed to do more to recruit students of color. “One area I know we need to work on is recruiting teacher candidates from diverse backgrounds,” Glass says. “We responded to that. We have a committee around equity and inclusion. We will work hard this year to implement recruiting strategies we discussed this past year.”

One of the strategies will be the launch of teacher academies in high school as a career pathway to teaching beginning in 2017-18. The academies will provide opportunities to recruit individuals into education as a profession, early college credit and field experiences. The teacher academies represent a particularly strong opportunity to recruit students from diverse backgrounds.

Glass adds that after receiving this year’s report, the university will pore over the aggregate data on graduates’ performance. “We get to see how candidates do in their first year of teaching,” she says. “We wanted that data for a long time.”