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Georgia

Georgia officials set out five years ago to improve teaching and learning in the state by revamping how teachers are prepared. The goal was to ensure students have access to the best possible instruction from educators who meet rigorous professional standards.

Fortunately for Peach State educators, the Council of Chief State School Officers formed the Network for Transforming Educator Preparation (NTEP) just when they were starting their effort. With the support of other states in the network, Georgia has made great strides in improving teaching.

“In Georgia, like many places, the teaching profession was considered flat. The only opportunity for advancement was to become a school administrator,” says Penney McRoy, the division director for educator preparation at the Georgia Professional Standards Commission. Now, she says, the state has a focus on professional growth that gives teachers opportunities to advance while remaining in the classroom and should make the profession more attractive to the talented young people it wants to attract.



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.

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1 Raising the Bar for Teachers

Georgia's plan to strengthen teacher licensure is part of a broader initiative to create a four-tiered licensure system that sets standards for teachers during initial preparation and throughout their careers. The idea is to end the system in which teachers earn a license for life and instead lay out a set of criteria for teachers to meet at different stages. This approach encourages them to continually improve their practice and pursue additional responsibilities based on demonstrations of accomplishment.

The state has made significant changes to how teachers renew their licenses, eliminating a system where educators could simply attend conferences or workshops for credits. Often, McRoy notes, these experiences weren't tied to teachers' own needs or those of schools.

"We have completely transformed professional learning," she says. "[It] has to be personalized, job-embedded, and tied to an effectiveness system for teachers as well as for schools."

The state ramped up expectations for teacher-candidates. Georgia adapted the standards of the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), a national accrediting organization. Students who wish to be admitted

to teacher preparation must have a minimum 2.5 grade point average. Those requirements were similar to those Georgia institutions had used.

But the state also significantly increased requirements for earning an initial teaching license. A new ethics assessment evaluates candidates' understanding of both professional ethics and the state's code of ethics; candidates are required to take the assessment upon entering teacher preparation and to pass it before earning a license. Georgia raised passing scores on the content assessments required for licensure and added a performance assessment, edTPA, which measures candidates' knowledge and skills in practice, based on their experience in classrooms.

These requirements made earning a license more challenging and helped ensure that only those most committed to teaching would enter preparation programs, says Bob Michael, associate vice chancellor of the University System of Georgia. "Those who are passionate, who want to be teachers, will be teachers no matter what," he says. "Those less passionate think, 'I could be a banker with less than that.' They don't select education as a major at freshmen orientation." Once students enter the program, the attrition rate is very low, he adds.

The Role of the Network

Although Georgia began its work to improve educator preparation before the creation of NTEP, state officials believe the network has helped accelerate their work by providing them with access to national experts, colleagues from other states, and some seed money to jump-start programs. For example, says McRoy, the state has learned from Louisiana about mentor training and from Kentucky about data collection and reporting.

These conversations have also helped Georgia officials move into the next phase of their work. Over the next few years, the state plans to revise principal preparation and professional development for experienced teachers. "Our biggest challenge is how to sustain momentum after the funding goes away," McRoy says. "NTEP funding is not tremendous, but what we have done with it has been extremely impactful."

2 Asking More of Preparation Programs

Like many states, Georgia was interested in providing prospective teachers with more extended clinical experiences so that they spend more time in classrooms with students, working alongside skilled mentors, before they become full-time teachers. Although the state's Professional Standards Commission requires a minimum of one full semester of clinical experience, the agency encourages institutions to provide a full year of classroom time for teacher-candidates.

Many institutions took up the challenge and voluntarily instituted a year-long clinical program, says McRoy. The extended time has benefited the candidates, she says. From anecdotal reports, principals say the teachers who have been through the year-long programs are better prepared. "Principals say, when we're hiring them, it's like hiring a second-year teacher," McRoy says.

The state has also encouraged institutions to review their programs and make improvements. As a result of edTPA, institutions have revised their teacher-preparation curriculum to include a greater emphasis on topics such as how to assess student learning, notes Michael. Most faculty members believe these changes are appropriate, he adds. "Faculty will tell you it's a good measure," he says. "It really does drill down into the key behaviors [candidates] should be demonstrating."

State officials also divided the state into nine regions and helped form P-20 partnerships in each region to enable

schools and higher education institutions to work together. Ultimately, these conversations will result in changes in preparation programs, according to Michael. For example, two institutions that provide teachers for a district might conclude their programs are duplicative and agree to complement one another by focusing on their strengths. "We're not there yet, but people are talking to each other a lot more than they used to."

The Professional Standards Commission has also stepped up its process for reviewing preparation programs. Based on the CAEP standards, the state will continue to review programs every seven years. But it will also review data from the programs annually. That way, by the time of the formal review, the institutions will have had opportunities to make improvements.

The primary goal of the review process is to ensure that institutions improve their practice continually, notes McRoy. But the state will also hold them accountable for progress. "We expect program providers to use annual performance data and program review data to improve. Our plan is to provide technical assistance and connect low-performing educator preparation programs (EPP) with their high-performing peers to help them improve. Should we find an EPP lacks the capacity to operate at expected levels, and over time does not address identified deficiencies, we will consider revoking approval," she says.

3 Using Data to Measure Success

Key to the program-approval process is a data system that provides information on program quality. The plan is to create two sets of program data. The first will include scores on content assessments and edTPA, and surveys of graduates after their first year of teaching to determine their satisfaction with their preparation. The second will feature outcome data, which will include summative performance data derived from principal observations of classroom teaching and surveys of principals in the schools where the first-year teachers taught.

Originally, state officials planned to include student growth data from the schools where new teachers taught as part of the outcome measures. However, in 2016, legislation was passed that reduced the weight of student growth in teacher evaluation and granted flexibility to school districts in the

selection of growth measures for teachers of courses that do not produce a growth percentile. The resulting high level of variability prohibits the use of this data for state-level, high-stakes decisions. State officials are considering whether to develop another outcome measure, but in the meantime, notes McRoy, institutions are interested in using the student growth data for their own improvement purposes. "We're not giving up on using the data," she says. "But we can't use it at the state level for high-stakes purposes."

Similarly, newly licensed teachers are beginning to use their edTPA scores to develop their plans for their first-year induction programs. They can see from the results where they are strong and where they need additional support.