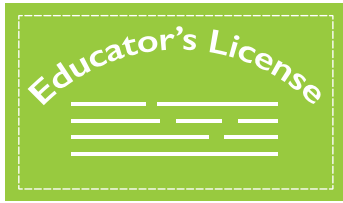


# License to Transform: Teachers Speak Out on Educator Licensure



**TEACH  
+PLUS**



**Massachusetts**

## Introduction .....

The Teach Plus Policy Fellows – a diverse group of teachers from many schools and districts – are deeply invested in the success of Massachusetts students. Over the past year and half, we have studied policy and advocacy while continuing to teach full time. We have brought our expertise as classroom teachers to our work with policymakers as we advocated for policies that would ensure that teachers and students can thrive.

We researched best practices and academic findings from across the country and surveyed Massachusetts teachers about their experiences with teacher licensure. We also cohosted an event (“Rethinking Teacher Licensure,” April, 30, 2014) with Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education Mitchell Chester, Associate Commissioner Heather Peske, and Director of Licensure Brian Devine in which 64 teachers shared their ideas for a new licensure system.

We believe that the current teacher licensure system fails to screen for teaching effectiveness, while creating unnecessary bureaucratic barriers. And we have recommendations to fix that. This policy brief argues that we must streamline licensure and connect it to measures of teacher effectiveness. This will help Massachusetts recruit, develop and retain high-quality teachers and increase the prestige of the teaching profession.

We believe the following should be the goals of the Massachusetts licensure system:

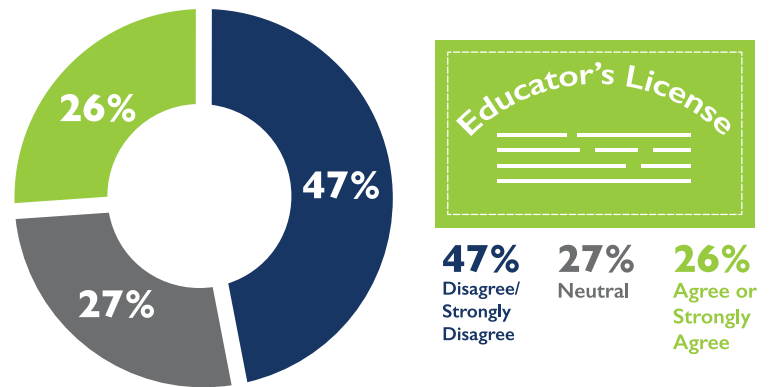
### ***Goals of Teacher Licensure System***

Above all, the licensure system should ensure that students have access to highly-effective teachers. Also...

- The system should not put up barriers to entry that deter potentially high-quality teaching candidates.
- The system should encourage effective teaching and mandate that ineffective teachers improve or exit.
- The system should place the smallest possible financial burden on teaching candidates and the state.
- The system should be clear and easy to navigate.
- The system should contribute to the prestige of the teaching profession.

## The Problem

The current licensure system in Massachusetts is bureaucratic; it is time-consuming and expensive for teachers as well as for the state. If this system ensured that students had access to highly effective teachers it would be worth it – but it does not. At the “Rethinking Teacher Licensure” event, teachers were deeply skeptical of the current licensure system. Barely a quarter agreed that the current licensure system is a meaningful proxy for teacher effectiveness.



In the education profession, licensure of educators is a meaningful proxy for effectiveness/ ability.

## The Opportunity

Until just a few years ago, most Massachusetts schools and districts had weak systems for identifying teacher effectiveness if they had any system at all. In the absence of these systems, the state designed a licensure system that did its best to require activities thought to connect to teacher effectiveness. Today, we know more about what matters – and we are beginning to have a system for identifying true teacher effectiveness.

Here is what the research tells us:

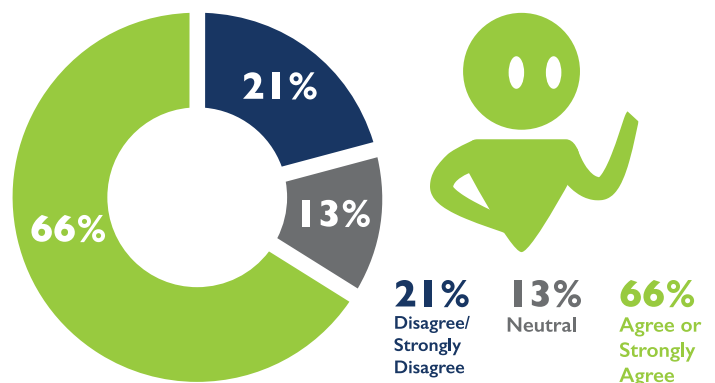
- Teacher effectiveness is the most important in-school factor in student achievement. <sup>i</sup>
- There is some evidence that strong scores on teacher certification exams correlate to teacher effectiveness. <sup>ii</sup>
- There is no correlation between a master’s degree in education and student reading or math scores. <sup>iii</sup>
- It is possible to measure teacher effectiveness, and current teacher effectiveness is a good predictor of future effectiveness. <sup>iv</sup>

Massachusetts districts are in the process of implementing evaluation systems that use multiple measures to evaluate teacher effectiveness. Effective implementation of new evaluation systems is far from complete. We believe, however, that these systems can provide an opportunity to connect licensure to proven teacher effectiveness – rather than connecting it to often-meaningless requirements and hoping that teachers who get over those hurdles can help their students succeed.

## The Solution

We believe that licensure should be tied to demonstrated teacher effectiveness, and streamlined to strip out unnecessary bureaucratic barriers. At the “Rethinking Teacher Licensure” event, two thirds of teachers agreed that teacher performance in the classroom should be a factor in teacher licensure.

This brief is intended to provide a framework for a licensure system that opens the door wide to great teachers, eliminating unnecessary bureaucracy and requirements, and tying licensure to Massachusetts’ definition of high-quality teaching. Below are our recommendations.



Performance and/or demonstrated ability in the classroom should be a factor in the decision to grant, renew, or advance an educator license.

# Recommendations for a New Licensure System in Massachusetts

The current language does not place value on the different stages in the teaching profession. Therefore we believe that we should create new categories of licenses with new names. As it stands, we have Preliminary, Initial and Professional licenses. We recommend Apprentice, Practitioner and Master licenses – and each license should be tied to evaluative measures for maintaining and/or advancing to a new level of license. **This system will require teacher evaluations to be fair and equitable across evaluators.**

## Section I: Entry to Pre-Service Training

**Recommendation 1:** In order to be admitted into a masters in a teaching program, applicants should have to pass Communications & Literacy and content-specific MTEs. <sup>v</sup>

Many Massachusetts teacher preparation programs are not sufficiently selective. According to the National Council on Teacher Quality, Massachusetts is one of 21 states that don't require a test for academic proficiency prior to entrance into preparation programs. <sup>vi</sup> In addition, some universities treat their educator preparation programs as "cash cows," forcing programs to lower admissions standards in order to generate additional revenue. <sup>vii</sup>

Currently, teacher preparation programs require applicants to provide personal and educational background information, references, and a personal statement and do not specify a minimum level of achievement on terms of GPA or required exams, such as the GRE. In our experience, not all preparation

### Cross-State Transfers/Reciprocity

**Recommendation:** If teachers are licensed in another state, they should be given a one-year license in Massachusetts, during which time they must pass the MTEs. The process should be simple, and the license should not require the schools hiring these teachers to jump through any additional hoops.

If our goal is to ensure that students have access to outstanding teachers, then we should make it as easy as possible for schools to hire great teachers from out-of-state.

We believe that teachers who are moving to Massachusetts should be given a one-year window in which they can pass the required MTEs. This would entail a temporary license, available only to teachers who are licensed in another state, which would last for one year. This license would allow schools to hire transferring teachers easily and without the need for additional paperwork or waivers.

**What This Will Achieve:** Implementation of this recommendation will provide schools with the ability to hire outstanding teachers from out-of-state. Students will have access to the best teachers that Massachusetts schools can attract.

*The transition from state to state as a teacher can be challenging. I had just renewed my teaching license in New York when I got a job as a teacher in Massachusetts. I found navigating the teacher licensure system challenging, and it seemed like there should have been an easier way for highly qualified teachers to move from one state to another. – Mallory Walker*

programs are sufficiently selective; some teaching candidates are not academically prepared or dedicated enough to become the kind of teachers our students deserve. Applicants who wish to be admitted to a masters in teaching program should be required to pass both the Communications and Literacy and content-specific MTEs prior to entry.

The benefits of this system are several: It will raise the bar for admittance – demonstrating the rigor of the teaching profession and raising its profile. It will also protect individuals who are not prepared to pass the MTEs from investing in tuition before they learn that they cannot qualify for a license. Finally, it will ensure that teaching candidates have peers in their prep-programs who demonstrate competence in basic literacy skills and academic content.

Additionally, candidates should begin a teaching program having demonstrated content competency in their subject area, which will allow these prospective teachers to focus on instructional practices, theories, and research. Making these licensure tests an application requirement will aid teacher preparation programs in admitting those applicants who have demonstrated a certain level of competency and capacity for the profession.

### **What This Will Achieve:**

Implementing this recommendation will ensure that teaching programs have a high caliber of students, thus improving their academic rigor and discourse, and protect potential candidates from spending money on tuition if they do not yet have the academic skills to receive a teaching license.

### **Recommendation 2: In order to be admitted into a teacher preparation program, candidates should have to observe a teacher in their desired age group for at least 12 hours.**

Teaching requires skill and passion. Many of our classmates in our teacher preparation programs dropped out or didn't become teachers. It is widely understood in the teaching profession that the observation of other teachers is an integral part in teachers' professional growth. The National Council on Accreditation of Teacher Education has recommended a greater emphasis on clinical practice in teacher education programs as a key strategy for improving effective practice among PK–12 teachers.<sup>viii</sup> Requiring applicants to observe teachers prior to being admitted to a teacher preparation program would provide them with a small window into what the profession entails and an experience to draw upon from the very beginning of their coursework. In addition, it may deter some potential teaching candidates who are not a fit for the profession before they invest in tuition. With federal, state, and local policy changing rapidly to meet the needs of our students, this observation requirement should also include some exposure to students identified as second language learners and/or students with disabilities.

### **What This Will Achieve:**

Implementing this recommendation will provide a basis for classroom discussion from the very start of prep programs. In addition, it will deter potential candidates who otherwise might discover that they don't want to teach after investing time and money in a preparation program.

*The Boston Teacher Residency requires applicants to complete 40 hours of observations; this was an invaluable experience. I originally thought I wanted to pursue a secondary license in science; however by the end of the 40-hour observation, it was clear that I was much better suited for middle school. Now I have been teaching for 11 years. – Marlena Montañez Penta*

# Section 2: Apprentice License

**Recommendation 3:** Teaching candidates should have to pass a performance assessment at the end of their practicum or internship that mirrors the state evaluation system. (Some standards will have to be altered so the system is applicable to people who don't have their own classrooms.) For those who enter teaching as interns without completing a preparation program first, they should pass the MTELs and complete the 12 hours of classroom observation before receiving their Apprentice license. The regular evaluation system should be used to determine interns' readiness for a full teaching license.

By requiring teaching candidates to earn a proficient performance assessment (including elements such as a portfolio and classroom observations) based on the new evaluation standards before these candidates receive their first teaching license, the state of Massachusetts would set high expectations for those entering the profession. <sup>ix</sup> These performance assessments should be rigorous measures designed or selected by each teacher preparation program, and approved by the state. These high standards will filter potential teacher candidates allowing only those who meet the standards to receive the first level of licensure. Additionally, it will require individuals who want to teach in Massachusetts to become familiar with the criteria they will be expected to meet as practitioners. For candidates entering the field through school sponsorship, such as charter school teachers, their school's evaluation system should be utilized as their performance assessment.

## **What This Will Achieve:**

Implementing this recommendation will ensure that teaching candidates are striving towards the same bar to which they will be held when they become teachers. And it will ensure that those who are unable to reach that bar will return for additional preparation to become classroom-ready or choose a more suitable profession.

**Recommendation 4:** Teaching candidates should require sign-off from effective and well-trained supervising teachers and their licensure program in order to receive an Apprentice license. Sign-offs should be submitted online so that education preparation programs cannot pressure supervising teachers to sign off on unsatisfactory candidates.

Many of us have served as supervising teachers for teacher preparation programs. While most of our student teachers have become effective, some have not. In these cases, it has often been the case that the programs pressured us to pass the student teachers, or ignored our feedback that the student teachers were not ready to teach.

*My practicum experience was invaluable because I worked with two cooperating teachers who were knowledgeable, nurturing, worked well with adults, and had proven success with their students. Too many times, student teachers work with mentor teachers who have little experience or have not demonstrated effectiveness with students – and they do not have the capacity to teach new teachers what they need to know to be successful. My experience taught me that learning from an experienced and effective teacher can make all the difference. - Carline Kelly*

Many preparation programs require teaching candidates to have their supervising teacher sign off on their evaluation in order to pass their practicum. However, in our experience, programs often ask supervising teachers to complete these evaluations in conjunction with the program's supervisor. (This is an attempt to minimize the amount of paperwork sent to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.) This process places pressure on the supervising teacher to pass the candidate.

By placing more weight on the supervising teacher’s sign-off and requiring sign-off not only to pass the practicum but also to receive the first level of licensure, many teachers will not be as easily swayed. Also, shifting this process online will hopefully encourage supervising teachers to be more honest about the candidate’s ability to teach and perform all the duties of the job, while minimizing the amount of paperwork.

### **What This Will Achieve:**

Implementation of this recommendation will ensure that the person who knows a teaching candidate’s teaching ability and work ethic best will have a say in whether the candidate receives a license. It will ensure that students have access to teachers who have proven their effectiveness in the classroom.

*Teacher candidates must be paired with a master teacher who is not only phenomenal with students but who has been trained to observe and coach new teachers. Teaching adults is not the same as teaching children and there are research-based practices that support adult education. Student teachers need high-quality targeted feedback, time to debrief and reflect upon their instruction, and ample opportunities to practice teaching. – Erin Lane*

**Recommendation 5:** The Apprentice license should last only two years with the possibility of a one-year renewal. After this time period, teachers should have to qualify for a Practitioner license or lose the opportunity to teach in Massachusetts unless they have further preparation.

The Apprentice license would allow those new to teaching to manage their own classroom for a maximum of three years. Three years of practical experience will guide the teaching candidates into their next license and allow the time to take the steps necessary to excel as educators. This experience will allow teachers to receive and seek feedback to shape their practice through mentorship, pursue the necessary requirements for the next level of licensure, gain the experience to grow, and learn the evaluation system.

### **What This Will Achieve:**

Limiting the Apprentice license to three years will ensure that students have access to effective teachers by ensuring that ineffective teachers improve or exit quickly – and place pressure on school systems to provide effective mentorship and induction.

## **Section 3: Practitioner License**

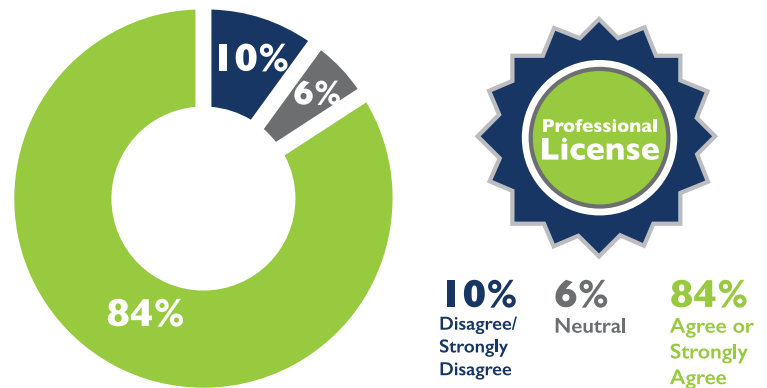
**Recommendation 6:** After teaching with an Apprentice license, a teacher should be able to apply for a Practitioner license. To obtain this full license, the teacher should have at least one evaluation with a rating of Proficient. In addition, the teacher should have completed a one year mentorship program with a trained mentor.

We believe that new teachers should be held accountable for becoming effective at their craft before they receive a full teaching license. The Practitioner license would recognize the skills and abilities of teachers who have demonstrated their proficiency in the classroom. Our peers agree. At the “Rethinking Teacher Licensure” event, 84 percent of teachers agreed that a full teaching license should indicate demonstrated ability in the classroom.

In our experience, new teachers need high quality mentorship during their first years of teaching in order to become effective in the classroom. This was also a theme that was echoed loudly among teachers who attended the “Rethinking Teacher Licensure” event.

### **What This Will Achieve:**

Implementation of this recommendation would raise the bar for the teaching profession in Massachusetts. It would ensure that teachers receive the necessary mentorship early in their careers – and also ensure that teachers who receive a full Practitioner teaching license have demonstrated that they are prepared to support their students’ success.



Assuming a Professional License follows an Initial License, a Professional License should indicate a certain degree of educator effectiveness based on demonstrated ability in the classroom.

**Recommendation 7:** Teachers should be able to renew their Practitioner licenses every five years if they continue to receive Proficient ratings and acquire a limited number of Professional Development Points through continuing education coursework, seminars, and professional development sessions. The professional development requirements should be less than the current system, and more flexible about what qualifies.

Teachers must always continue to grow and develop, and that often requires formal training. While the current licensure system seeks to ensure this continued development via heavy requirements for professional development points, we believe the new evaluation system – and teachers’ own motivation to serve our students well – can bear a lot of the responsibility of holding teachers accountable for that continued growth.

Teachers in the field should be reaching Proficient ratings on evaluations as well as ensuring they are continuing their learning to maintain and/or advance their skills. We believe that teachers will pursue appropriate professional development that helps them move towards the goals and competencies defined through goal-setting and evaluation process. Therefore, we believe teachers should be able to obtain professional development points through a variety of different learning opportunities that meet their current learning needs – and ultimately to demonstrate that they are effective teachers for students.

### **What This Will Achieve:**

Implementation of this recommendation will align licensure requirements with the activities necessary to ensure that all members of the teaching force are helping our students succeed. It will also place the majority of the emphasis on outcomes – proficiency – rather than on inputs (PDPs), which may not actually support student learning.

***Recommendation 8:*** If teachers receive two Unsatisfactory evaluations within five years, they should return to an Apprentice license and meet the requirements of pursuing a Practitioner license – including being supervised by a mentor practitioner who evaluates their performance.

If our licensure system is going to ensure that students have access to effective teachers, then teachers deemed ineffective must improve their practice in order to retain their license. We want to continue to develop high standards of teaching, and if teachers are not performing to those standards, there needs to be further evaluation of their practice. The change in license status should reflect that change. This might give teachers time to make the improvements necessary to return to a Practitioner license, or potentially make the decision to leave the field if teaching is not the right fit.

### ***What This Will Achieve:***

Implementation of this recommendation will raise the prestige of the profession by ensuring that a teaching license is a meaningful indication of teaching effectiveness. It will maintain a high standard for teacher licensure and encourage low-performers to improve or exit.

***Recommendation 9:*** Improve the evaluation system to ensure equity. Evaluation systems must be unbiased, effective, and consistently implemented across schools, districts, and the state.

If teachers' licensure status is going to be based on performance, then the system of evaluation must be consistent so that all teachers are being evaluated fairly. We are concerned that different evaluators, schools, and districts have varying standards of evaluation. Currently, a teacher who receives a Proficient evaluation in one school might receive a Needs Improvement score in another school. Evaluators need training and support to ensure that teachers are receiving fair and equitable evaluations. This is vital if we are going to mandate that the evaluation system is going to be used as a component of teacher licensure determination.

### ***What This Will Achieve:***

Implementation of this recommendation will ensure that the new licensure system is fair – and raise the level of teacher effectiveness through high-quality feedback and support.

## **Section 4: Master License**

***Recommendation 10:*** The final license should be a Master license. Teachers should be able to earn a Master license by demonstrating that they are highly effective teachers through the state evaluation system. This license should be automatically renewed every five years as long as the teacher continues to receive Exemplary ratings.

Currently, there are neither benefits nor increased recognition for teachers when they receive their professional license in Massachusetts. Receiving professional licensure requires that teachers teach for five



years and also complete one of several options, most of which include additional graduate-level course work. Research indicates that completion of this coursework does not necessarily mean that teachers are more effective.<sup>x</sup> An advanced license should mean something more than just an application fee.

We recommend that teachers be able to earn a Master license that not only reflects their experience, but also reflects their effectiveness in the classroom. There should be no requirement that teachers pursue a Master license; teachers should be able to maintain a Practitioner license for an entire career.

In order to receive and maintain the Master license, teachers should have to receive Exemplary ratings under their district's evaluation system. The Master license, therefore, would become a symbol of excellence for teachers, bringing increased recognition to the field of education. An additional benefit would be that the Master license would be automatically renewed every five years as long as the teacher maintains Exemplary ratings on the evaluation system. Teachers would not need to document professional development. This would save time and effort, streamlining the process of license renewal for this outstanding group of teachers. Districts may choose to provide additional compensation or leadership roles for Master teachers.

### ***What This Will Achieve:***

A Master license would professionalize teaching in Massachusetts and help retain exemplary teachers. It would help to identify outstanding teachers for leadership and best-practice sharing.

## ***Special Education Licenses***

**Recommendation:** The special education license should be a dependent license – one that teachers can only receive in addition to a license in an early childhood, elementary or a middle or high school content area.

Special education teachers should be skilled teachers of content first. The first license indicates an area of expertise; the additional special education license indicates that the teacher has additional knowledge in instructing a special population within the subject area. The candidate for a special education license should be required to complete coursework in a separate teacher preparation program, participate in a supervised practicum, and demonstrate content knowledge.

There should be a provision so that general education teachers who have relevant experience with students with disabilities and who have participated in appropriate professional development should be able to earn credit toward their special education license. For example, someone who teaches math to students with disabilities should hold both a math license and a special education license. This will ensure that the students are receiving high-quality math instruction that meets their specific needs. General education teachers – such as general education teachers who have been co-teaching with a special education teacher – may gain experience instructing students with disabilities in their classrooms. If such a general education teacher decides to pursue a special education license, there should be a mechanism whereby he or she can earn credit for this experience, and perhaps related professional development, fast-tracking his or her special education license.

**What this will achieve:** This requirement will ensure that students in special education classes receive high-quality instruction from teachers who are experts in their content and in the skills required to teach special education courses. Special education students will have the opportunity to reach their potential.

# Conclusion.....

These proposed changes to the educator licensure system have several goals: to simplify the administrative process, to recognize excellence, and most importantly to help ensure our profession attracts, trains, and retains effective educators. The pre-training observations can serve as an opportunity to introduce prospective teachers to the rigors and rewards of teaching. The revised three-tier licensing system would provide a clear, easy-to-navigate pathway for professionals that encourages continual self-improvement and incorporates real measures of teacher effectiveness. Our recommendations also address specialized licenses by emphasizing the important strengths of special education teachers and providing more options to educators entering Massachusetts from other states.

With these recommendations, Massachusetts has an opportunity to join other states as exemplars of strong educator licensure policy. The current model of educator licensure gets educators in the classroom through a variety of entry-points. Our proposed model maintains access to the profession while elevating standards. This is a necessary step in helping keep the best members of our profession in the classrooms where they can continue to have the maximum impact on student achievement.

## Teach Plus Massachusetts Policy Fellows

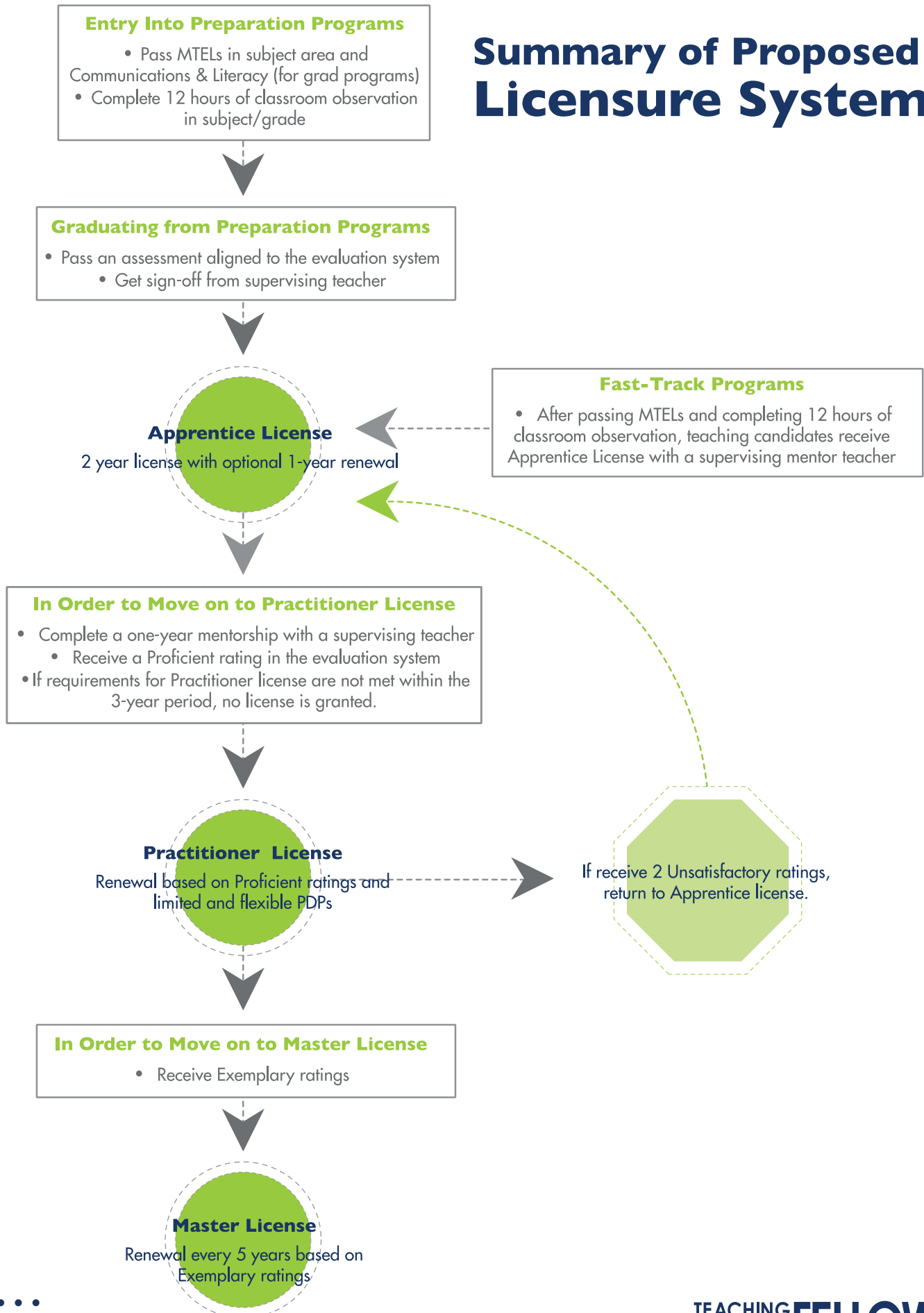
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*Special thanks to Paul Schor for his research on teacher licensure systems.*

# Summary of Proposed Licensure System



# End Notes .....

- <sup>i</sup> Carnegie Corporation of New York. (2001). *Teachers For A New Era: A National Initiative to Improve the Quality of Teaching*. New York.
- <sup>ii</sup> Boyd, D., Goldhaber, D., Lankford, H., & Wyckoff, J. (2007). The effect of certification and preparation on teacher quality. *Future Child*, 17(1), 45-68.
- <sup>iii</sup> Clotfelter, C., Ladd, H., & Vigdor, J. (2007). How and why do teacher credentials matter for student achievement? CALDER Working Paper 2. And Rivkin, S., Hanushek, E. & Kain, J. (2005). Teachers, schools and academic achievement. *Econometrica*, 79, 418-458.
- <sup>iv</sup> Nye, B., Konstantopulous, S., & Hedges, L. (2004). How large are teacher effects? *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 26, 237-257. And Kane, T., McCaffrey, D., Miller, T., & Staiger, D. (2013). Have We Identified Effective Teachers? Validating Measures of Effective Teaching Using Random Assignment. Retrieved from [http://www.metproject.org/downloads/MET\\_Validating\\_Using\\_Random\\_Assignment\\_Research\\_Paper.pdf](http://www.metproject.org/downloads/MET_Validating_Using_Random_Assignment_Research_Paper.pdf)
- <sup>v</sup> Sixty percent of teachers who attended the “Rethinking Teacher Licensure” event on April 30, 2014 agreed that “Every incoming teacher should have to pass a written content test such as the MTEL to earn an Initial License.” Twenty-one percent disagreed, and 13 percent were neutral.
- <sup>vi</sup> National Council on Teacher Quality (2013). *State Teacher Policy Yearbook: Massachusetts*. Retrieved from [http://www.nctq.org/dmsView/2013\\_State\\_Teacher\\_Policy\\_Yearbook\\_Massachusetts\\_NCTQ\\_Report](http://www.nctq.org/dmsView/2013_State_Teacher_Policy_Yearbook_Massachusetts_NCTQ_Report)
- <sup>vii</sup> The Education Schools Project. (2006). *Educating School Teachers*. Washington, DC: Levine, Arthur.
- <sup>viii</sup> National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education. (2010). *Transforming Teacher Education Through Clinical Practice: A National Strategy to Prepare Effective Teachers*. Washington, DC.
- <sup>ix</sup> In a small survey of 41 teachers conducted by Fellows, we found that 41% of teachers agreed that “licensure should be tied to the assessment of a portfolio of tasks stemming from teaching a group of students,” and only 29% disagreed. (The rest were neutral.)
- <sup>x</sup> Clotfelter, C., Ladd, H., & Vigdor, J. (2007). How and why do teacher credentials matter for student achievement? CALDER Working Paper 2. and Rivkin, S., Hanushek, E., & Kain, J. (2005). Teachers, schools and academic achievement. *Econometrica*, 79, 418-458.