

Teacher Certification

Public school teachers in Connecticut must hold a valid certificate (i.e. license) issued by the State Department of Education (SDE) in order to teach. According to SDE, just under 42,000 full-time equivalent teachers were certified in the state at the start of the 2004-05 school year.

Over the years, Connecticut has modified its teacher certification requirements in part with the intent of increasing the overall quality of teachers in the state. Beginning with the state's Education Enhancement Act in 1986, changes have included: replacing the previous two-tiered teacher certification system with a three-tiered system; increasing professional development requirements; establishing an alternative route to certification that does not require a college degree specifically in education; and requiring beginning teachers to complete an assessment program in order to maintain their state certification. Some current teacher certification requirements, therefore, have been in place for over 20 years. Further, the state's teacher certification requirements, and the changes to such requirements over time, may impact the ability to attract and retain teachers in Connecticut.

A study of teacher certification will include two phases. Phase One will be a performance review of the state's Beginning Educator Support and Training Program (BEST), which is one aspect of teacher certification. Phase Two will examine Connecticut's teacher certification system more broadly and its relative impact on the state's ability to recruit and retain qualified teachers to the extent it can be determined.

Phase One: Beginning Educator Support and Training Program (2007)

The BEST Program, first implemented in 1989, is a preparation program for beginning teachers. The program's mission is to ensure that students in Connecticut are taught by highly qualified and competent teachers. Beginning teachers employed by public schools in Connecticut¹ who hold a valid initial educator certificate must successfully complete the program's requirements to be eligible for the provisional educator certificate, which is the second-level certificate in the state's three-tiered teacher certification system.

The BEST Program has two components to help beginning teachers strengthen their subject matter knowledge, instructional strategies, and overall understanding of students as learners. As a way of introducing educators to the teaching profession and the BEST Program requirements, beginning teachers are first required to work with trained mentors, who are experienced teachers, and to attend various state- and school-based training, seminars, and clinics. During their second year in the program, teachers are required to submit a discipline-specific "teaching portfolio," which is assessed by trained evaluators. The portfolio is designed to determine whether or not a beginning teacher meets specific competency standards and demonstrates the skills necessary to continue his or her certification. (Teachers not meeting the portfolio performance standard by the end of their second year in the program have an additional opportunity during the third year. Those not meeting

¹ Includes full-time and part-time teachers and long-term substitutes in local or regional schools, charter and magnet schools, regional educational service centers, approved private special education facilities, schools operated by the Departments of Children and Families, Correction, or Mental Retardation, or an approved special education facility.

the standard by the end of year three are not eligible for re-issuance of their teaching certificate. Teachers may re-apply for their initial educator certification only after they have completed a state-approved/planned program of intervening study and experience during the course of one school year.)

Area of Focus

The first phase of the study will focus on the effectiveness of the Beginning Educator Support and Training Program in achieving its intended objectives of supporting beginning teachers in Connecticut and assessing their overall skills and qualifications.

Areas of Analysis

1. Review the program's history, including its original -- and current -- purpose and design.
2. Identify any major changes or trends relating to program purpose, budget and staff resources, and administration.
3. Examine the current role of SDE and local school districts in the operation and oversight of the program.
4. Determine the number of program participants and resource personnel, including teachers, teacher mentors, district facilitators, portfolio assessors, and trainers, and calculate how this has changed in recent years.
5. Describe the process used to recruit, train, and oversee teacher mentors, district facilitators, portfolio assessors, and training staff; determine participation levels statewide.
6. Assess the adequacy of resources in relation to participants' needs and any established benchmarks or best practices.
7. Review program requirements, support programs, evaluation standards, and state- and school-based costs of the program.
8. Assess program activities and results, including teachers' success and failure rates in continuing their certification, to determine if program is meeting its intended objectives.
9. Determine what, if any, measurements the state has in place for the program and what those measurements show in terms of performance and results, and whether actions have been taken to rectify any instances of poor program performance or results.
10. Examine the impact, if any, of the federal No Child Left Behind Act, particularly the "highly qualified teachers" requirement, on the BEST Program.
11. Evaluate whether the BEST Program model is effective in supporting, training, assessing, and retaining qualified new teachers in the state in comparison with other models used in surrounding states and any national criteria or standards.

Phase Two (2008):

The second phase of the teacher certification study will examine the state's goals for certifying teachers and the degree to which those goals are being met. The study will also examine: 1) the state's teacher certification system and any recent changes to that system, identifying the relationship of such changes with teacher recruitment and retention as can be determined; 2) the operations within the Department of Education to effectively and efficiently administer the teacher certification process; 3) the state's Alternative Route to Teacher Certification program as a way to attract and retain qualified new teachers; 4) the various endorsement areas under the certification system and how they are developed; 5) current professional development requirements for teachers to maintain their certification; and 6) how Connecticut's teacher certification requirements compare with those of surrounding states, including any reciprocity provisions that may exist.

Note: A more detailed scope of study for Phase Two will be developed at a later date.