From the standards they set for becoming a teacher to how they oversee the programs that train the future education workforce, state policymakers can play an important role in teacher preparation. And strengthening that oversight role has been the focus of measures passed in states such as Indiana and Wisconsin in recent years.

Starting in 2016, Indiana will have a matrix rating system that evaluates teacher-participation programs (the result of SB 409 [2], passed in 2013, and HB 1388 [3], passed in 2014). Each program will be evaluated and rated based on several factors — the rate at which prospective teachers successfully complete the program, for example, as well as how the program’s students fare on Indiana’s teacher-licensing exam.

Wisconsin’s SB 461 [4], passed in 2012, requires each teacher-education program in the state to report the rate at which its graduates pass the state licensure test on a first try. State education leaders are also developing a process to evaluate teacher-education programs based on the performance and effectiveness of their graduates.

Lastly, the Wisconsin measure sets a higher standard for someone wanting to be an elementary school teacher or reading specialist. These prospective educators must now pass a tougher licensure test that assesses their knowledge of reading instruction.

This type of licensing requirement is one of many state policies analyzed every year by the National Council on Teacher Quality [5]. The council evaluates the laws and rules that every state has in place to “deliver well-prepared teachers.” Its most recent study ranks Indiana as having the strongest policies in the Midwest and among the strongest in the nation. For example, Indiana requires:

- prospective elementary school teachers to pass a content test in which they get passing scores in all four major content areas: mathematics, reading and language arts, science and social studies (Minnesota has a similar requirement);
- prospective elementary school teachers to pass a test assessing their knowledge of research-based reading instruction (Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin also require this); and
- prospective middle-school teachers and high school teachers to pass tests assessing their knowledge of subject-specific content (Iowa, Kansas and Ohio also require the passage of such tests by all middle school teachers; across the Midwest, some type of content-area testing is required for high school certification).

Indiana is also one of five Midwestern states (along with Iowa, Michigan, Nebraska and Wisconsin) that require individuals to pass a basic-skills test before being admitted into a teacher-preparation program.

Another policy option is to ensure K-12 instructors get enough support during their first few years in the profession. Since 2011, new teachers in Ohio have begun their careers with a four-year Resident Educator license. Over this four-year span, they work with a mentor and receive ongoing professional development.

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