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Research shows the quality of the teacher workforce is essential for student success, and the Legislature is focused on cultivating a strong, diverse teacher workforce. However, New Mexico, like many states, has struggled with teacher shortages. Many argue efforts to build the educator workforce have been hampered, in part, by a licensure test that many first-time test takers fail.

In 2003, the New Mexico Legislature passed a comprehensive education reform package, including the creation of the three-tier teacher licensure system. Minimum salaries are tied to each licensure level, and over the past 20 years, those minimums have been raised an average of 52 percent. To become a licensed teacher, individuals can complete a traditional four-year education degree or, if they already have a bachelor's degree, an alternative licensure pathway, after which they are awarded an alternative license.

New Mexico's Three-Tier Licensure System

The three-tiered licensure system created as part of the 2003 comprehensive public school reform legislation was intended to enhance student achievement and address a teacher shortage identified in the late 1990s. This progressive career system in which licensees are required to demonstrate increased competencies and undertake increased duties as they progress through the licensure levels incorporates three levels of licensure: level 1, a provisional license, level 2, a professional license, and level 3, a master teacher license.

According to the National Council on Teacher Quality, 28 states allow districts to set their own salary schedules. In New Mexico, the three-tier licensure system sets salary minimums in statute.

The key components of the three-tiered system include that

- The Public Education Department (PED) sets educational standards for candidates interested in obtaining a teacher license. Currently, candidates must complete or be enrolled in an approved education preparation program and pass a series of Praxis examinations.
- The three-tiered licensure system is aligned with teacher compensation and each tier is designed with a base salary attached. As teachers move from provisional to professional teacher status, they earn greater compensation. In 2003, the minimum salaries for each of the prescribed levels were established in law: \$30 thousand for level 1; \$40 thousand for level 2; and \$50 thousand for level 3-A. Since 2003, teacher minimum salaries have increased to \$50 thousand for level 1;

PED Licensure Processing Fees	
Initial Teacher License	\$150
Renewal Teacher License	\$120
Adding an Endorsement	\$120

Source: PED

\$60 thousand for level 2; and \$70 thousand for level 3-A. This represents an average 52 percent increase in minimum salary over the past twenty years.

Teacher Licensure Test Passage Rates (School Year 2020-2021)			
	Passage Rate	Passing Score	Median Score
Core Academic Skills for Ed: Math	74%	150	166
Core Academic Skills for Ed: Reading	83%	156	176
Core Academic Skills for Ed: Writing	61%	162	164
Teaching Reading K-12	47%	156	155
Teaching Reading Elementary	66%	159	162

Source: PED

Teacher Initial License Eligibility

Section 22-10A-6 NMSA 1978 requires a traditional licensure program to include a bachelor's degree or higher and completion of an approved teacher preparation program in addition to requiring candidates to pass a core academic knowledge assessment and content knowledge exams that align with the teaching

certification area. Requirements for candidates in an alternative licensure program include a bachelor's degree, a passing score on state-approved subject-area examinations and, within two years of teaching, completion of a 12-semester hour alternative licensure program at a department-approved teacher preparation program.

The Legislature has established general course requirements for licensed teachers to meet through state law, but has left specific educator preparation program course requirements up to PED to develop. According to Section 22-10A-6 NMSA 1978, individuals seeking licensure in elementary, special, early childhood, or secondary education must complete a minimum of 41 credit hours in the college of arts and sciences that include:

- Nine semester hours in communication,
- Six semester hours in mathematics,
- Eight semester hours in laboratory science,
- Nine semester hours in social and behavioral science, and
- Nine semester hours in humanities and fine arts.

In addition to these course requirements, a candidate seeking an elementary license is required to complete six hour of reading courses, and a person seeking a secondary license is required to complete three hours of reading courses in subject matter content.

Educator Testing Requirements. To become a licensed educator in New Mexico, candidates must pass all required Praxis examinations. The Praxis examination was adopted in New Mexico in 2020, replacing the New Mexico Teacher Assessments, and is used in over 40 states nationwide. Testing requirements differ across teacher license type and endorsement. For example, to apply for a kindergarten-eighth grade license, teacher licensure candidates must pass

- Core Academic Skills for Educators in Reading,
- Core Academic Skills for Educators in Mathematics,
- Core Academic Skills for Educators in Writing,
- Principles of Learning and Teaching Grades K-6,
- Elementary Education: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, and
- Teaching Reading Elementary.

PED has identified licensure testing as a barrier for entering the teaching professions. Beginning in July 2022, PED plans to no longer require the Core Academic Skills for Education in math, reading, or writing.

Level 1

A level 1 teaching license is a five-year provisional license for beginning teachers that requires formal mentorship for at least one school year and an annual performance evaluation conducted by a school administrator. Level 1 license holders are required by PED to advance their license after five years. If a level 1 teacher is interested in advancing sooner, PED allows level 1 license holders to begin the advancement process after three years of teaching.

PED notes 5,171 educators, or 14 percent of total licensed teachers, in New Mexico currently hold level 1 licenses. During the 2022 legislative session, the Legislature amended the School Personnel Act to increase minimum salaries to \$50 thousand for level 1 teachers.

National research found a quarter of test takers who do not pass the test the first time do not retake it within the three-year period.

Alternative Special Education

Level 1 License. When closely examining New Mexico's teacher vacancies by grade level and general area, the NM Southwest Outreach Academic Research Evaluation and Policy Center report finds the largest need is for special education teachers. [National research](#) finds when faced with shortages, principals often resort to filling special education vacancies with underprepared teachers, which could mean hiring a teacher certified in a field other than special education or a teacher with an alternative credential with little initial training in special education. During the 2021 legislative session, lawmakers amended NMSA 22-10A-8 subsection B 1978 to add an additional 15-week student teaching requirement for teacher candidates participating in a special education alternative licensure program. School districts might not all be aware of this change, which will impact the hiring of special education teachers for the 2022-2023 school year. PED notes the department is encouraging districts to take advantage of the \$6 million student teaching appropriation to PED in the General Appropriations Act of 2022 to provide a stipend for special education teachers completing their 15-week student teacher requirement.

Elementary License Testing Requirements	
Praxis Assessment	Cost per Test
Core Academic Skills for Educators: Reading	\$90
Core Academic Skills for Educators: Math	\$90
Core Academic Skills for Educators: Writing	\$90
Core Academic Skills for Educators: Combined*	\$150
Elementary Education: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment	\$130
Teaching Reading: Elementary Assessment	\$156

Source: PED

*Teacher candidates have the option of taking a combined core academic skills assessment which includes reading, math, and writing.

Level 2

After teaching a minimum of three years under a level 1 license, teachers are eligible to apply for a nine-year level 2 license. To progress to a level 2 license, teachers are currently required to complete an approved mentoring program and submit a professional development dossier to PED.

Professional Development Dossier Costs	
Initial Submission Fee	\$320
1 Strand Resubmission	\$110
2 Strand Resubmission	\$220
3 Strand Resubmission	\$320

Source: PED

PED reports 11.6 thousand educators or 31 percent of total teachers in New Mexico currently hold a level 2 teacher license. During the 2022 legislative session, the Legislature amended the School Personnel Act to increase minimum salaries to \$60 thousand for level 2 teachers.

New Mexico Teacher Licenses by Level (School Year 2021-2022)		
License Level	Certification Count	Percentage of Total Licenses
Level One	5171	14%
Level Two	11622	31%
Level Three	20810	55%

Source: PED

Level 3

Level three is the highest level of teaching license in New Mexico. A level 3A license is a nine-year license. After teaching a minimum of three years on a level 2 license, a teacher may advance from level 2 to level 3 by obtaining approval from their school district and earning a national board certification in their focus area of teaching or **holding a master’s degree or higher** and completing a dossier.

PED reports 20.8 thousand educators, or 55 percent of total licensed teachers, in New Mexico currently hold a level 3 teacher license. During the 2022 legislative session, the Legislature amended the School Personnel

Act to increase minimum salaries to \$60 thousand for level 2 teachers.

Considerations

Potential Inefficiency of Dossier System. New Mexico established its three-tiered licensure system 15 years ago, and the basic tenets of the system guide teacher salaries and professional advancement today. The professional development dossier, which teachers initially had to submit to advance from one tier to the next, was intended to ensure quality teaching. A 2019 LESC review of the system found **nearly all teachers’ dossiers were approved** by evaluators, calling into question whether the process was improving quality.

Incentivizing Professional Growth. Efforts by teachers who carve out time to collaborate with peers or seek out professional development, are not always recognized. **New Mexico’s three-tiered licensure system, with its emphasis on the use of the dossier, was intended to reward teachers for effective teaching and pursuing a master’s degree, as well as to provide leadership opportunities.** Instead, the system is a technicality tied to increased pay rather than a lever for professional development. Research indicates successful systems offer multiple tracks for advancement, including teachers who wish to remain in the classroom, those who want to pursue school or school district leadership, and those who want to provide specialized services

Teacher Licensure Tests. Licensure testing of prospective teachers is one of the primary tools states use to ensure teachers have a basic level of content knowledge. The credentialing role of testing requirements has become increasingly controversial, and national researchers have investigated the predictive validity of licensure tests, or the extent to which test scores predict teaching performance evaluations and student academic outcomes. In New Mexico, some stakeholders have expressed challenges with licensure examinations, noting little correlation between passage of tests and teacher success. Conversely, national research shows both strong and weak relationships between **teachers’ test scores, or their ability to pass the content licensure test, and future effectiveness in the classroom.** The National Council on Teacher Quality, a nonpartisan think tank, recommends states seeking alternatives to licensure tests should weigh whether a proposed alternative is sufficiently broad in content that it is both a valid and reliable measure of content knowledge.

