Primary Findings

1. **State policies are remarkably inflexible and outdated.**

Considering that human capital is the essential component of the teaching profession, states still cling to policies that reflect neither the flexibility nor the reality of today's workforce.

- Most states do not require that teachers receive annual performance evaluations, which is counter to the norm in most professions. Only 14 states require annual evaluations, and only 7 direct districts that they can dismiss teachers after two unsatisfactory evaluations.
- Pay reform has advanced, with 28 states supporting programs that tie teacher pay to district and school needs (differential pay). However, only 12 states fund programs rewarding teachers for classroom effectiveness.
- While significant advancements have been made in developing value-added methodologies, only 15 states have put the necessary components in place to fairly evaluate a teacher’s effectiveness through a value-added model.
- Despite the promise of new alternate routes to teacher certification for talented liberal arts graduates and mid-career professionals, only 6 states offer genuine alternate routes.
- In 23 states, current teachers who want to move to other states must navigate a Byzantine path to earn licensure, often having to complete additional coursework or even repeat preparation programs. Only 27 states have set appropriate standards on what constitutes a major for teacher graduates, further complicating the process.

2. **States are not paying enough attention to who goes into teaching.**

States provide significant funding to teacher preparation programs, particularly in state-funded universities, yet there is little oversight of candidates' academic caliber.

- Although 41 states require programs to administer a basic skills test, 24 of these states delay testing until completion of the preparation program. Programs that accept aspiring teachers who cannot pass a basic skills test may lower the rigor of their courses, remediating basic skills instead of preparing teachers for the classroom.
- States set insufficient requirements for the academic selectivity of alternate route programs, despite the fact that these programs are premised on the concept that nontraditional candidates must have strong subject-area knowledge and/or above-average academic backgrounds. Only 12 states set a sufficient academic standard for alternate route candidates, one that is higher than what is expected of traditional candidates.
- Only a handful of states recognize new teachers who bring superior academic caliber into the profession. 47 states do not confer beginning teacher licenses that distinguish candidates' academic performance.
3. States do not appropriately oversee teacher preparation programs.

A major weakness in the teacher-quality equation is linked to the fact that states fail to hold
teacher preparation programs accountable for their admissions standards, efficiency of program
delivery or, most importantly, the quality of their graduates.

- States do not ensure that preparation programs only admit teacher candidates with
  sufficient basic skills to enable them to complete the program. Only 17 states require
  programs to make basic skills testing a condition of admission.
- States do not hold preparation programs accountable for the quality of the teachers they
  produce, but rather continue to use ineffective program approval processes that
  emphasize inputs. Only 18 states collect any meaningful objective data that reflect
  program effectiveness. States do an even poorer job of holding alternate route preparation
  programs accountable.
- 11 states further weaken their approval processes by connecting program approval to
  accreditation, which is almost wholly focused on inputs rather than outcomes.
- States also fail to prevent programs from requiring excessive professional coursework.
  NCTQ found programs in 36 states that require the equivalent of more than two full majors
  of education coursework, which leaves little room for electives and adequate subject-
  matter preparation.
- States provide even less guidance in the area of preparation of special education
  teachers. NCTQ found programs in 16 states that require the equivalent of more than
  three full majors of education coursework—and these were not programs training teachers
  to work with severely disabled children.

4. States use false proxies as measures of teacher quality.

Across many policy areas, states rely on inappropriate indicators that do not provide meaningful
information about teachers’ qualifications or effectiveness.

- The majority of states rely on site visits and syllabi review to determine approval of
  teacher preparation programs. Only 18 states include any meaningful objective data in
  their approval process, such as programs' graduates' first-year evaluations or the
  academic achievement of graduates' students.
- 17 states rely on reviews of college transcripts to decide whether to award licensure to a
  teacher already licensed in another state. Licensing tests are a more valid way to verify
  teachers' qualifications; yet only 16 states require all out of state teachers to pass their
  licensing tests.
- While it is important to define the attributes and attitudes that teachers should have—
  known as teacher dispositions, they cannot be measured by a licensing test and thus
  should not be included in state standards. 28 states’ standards place too much emphasis
  on dispositions, rather than focusing on what teachers must know and should be able to
  do.

5. States do not appreciate the dual nature of licensing tests.

Licensing tests can serve both as the gatekeeper on minimum qualifications and as a tool that
helps states to be more flexible. However, while European and Asian systems depend heavily on
tests, states in this country are often reluctant to do so.
• At best, states screen only for the most minimal standards when individuals apply to undergraduate teacher preparation programs. Only 17 states require teacher candidates to pass a common test in basic reading, writing and arithmetic that is estimated to assess middle school level skills. No states require subject-area tests as a criterion for entry, a useful mechanism that would also allow programs to exempt qualified candidates from some core academic requirements.

• While many states require that a teacher have a major in the intended subject area, a rigorous test could serve the same purpose. Only 16 states allow teachers going through an alternate route to take a test to demonstrate subject-matter knowledge, failing to accommodate the diverse backgrounds of the nontraditional candidate.

• While some states require elementary teachers to take a reading course, states have no assurance that these courses deliver the scientifically based reading instruction that teachers need. A test would solve this problem, but 40 states have yet to adopt this simple solution and another 7 have put in place inadequate tests.

• NCLB currently requires middle school teachers to earn a major or pass a test, but the law is problematic. Many teachers are reluctant to take a test after they have been out of college for a while. States could alleviate this problem by requiring programs to prepare and then test middle school teachers in two areas, but only 15 states currently do so.

• While all states have teaching standards, most states do not follow up to make sure teachers learn these standards. 32 states require a test of professional knowledge and only 9 of these states have customized a test to match their own standards. Standards are meaningless unless they can be tested.

• Licensing tests represent the minimal knowledge teachers need. Yet 20 states give some teachers up to three years (or even more!) to pass these tests. That is three years of students being taught by someone who may not possess the basic knowledge needed for the job.

• When deciding what license to grant a teacher from out of state, states are generally reluctant to waive their coursework requirements, but instead grant liberal waivers of testing requirements. 34 states exempt veteran teachers from tests, as if experience could serve as an adequate substitute for subject-matter competency.

6. States continue to neglect content preparation for teachers.

Despite continuous concern about improving the content preparation of America’s teachers, states are still failing to ensure breadth, depth and relevance to the classroom in content preparation.

• States’ content standards and coursework requirements for elementary teachers fall well short of the mark, omitting critical areas of knowledge. For example, 18 states make no mention of geometry and 42 states make no mention of American history. Only 3 states require the study of American literature, 6 require children’s literature and only 3 require the study of art history.

• While NCLB has succeeded in shoring up much of the content preparation of secondary teachers, states still struggle with middle school teacher qualifications. 23 states still allow some teachers trained for the elementary classroom to teach seventh and eighth grades.

• Few states are doing enough to make sure that future elementary teachers know how to teach reading, arguably the most important job of a teacher. Only 19 states require programs to prepare teachers in the science of reading.
7. States do not ensure that special education teachers are well-prepared to teach students with disabilities.

States contribute to special education teacher shortages by providing too little guidance to teacher preparation programs and not taking steps to assist special education teachers in meeting highly qualified requirements.

- State standards for the preparation of special education teachers are woefully inadequate. A mere 4 states have strong standards that are clear, explicit and comprehensive about what teachers should know in order to teach students with disabilities.
- Few states require special education teachers to have subject-matter knowledge. States shortchange special education students by providing them with teachers who are not prepared to teach them content.
- States are not requiring that teacher preparation programs assume any responsibility for ensuring that secondary special education teachers are highly qualified, leaving the task up to districts instead. Only 14 states require secondary special education teachers to graduate highly qualified in even one content area.
- Unlike most other teachers, a HOUSSE route is needed for secondary special education teachers, so that they can achieve highly qualified status in all the subjects they teach. Not one state has a customized HOUSSE route for new secondary special education teachers.
- States give teacher preparation programs free rein over the professional coursework they require special education candidates to take. Programs that require the equivalent of three majors of professional coursework may be a deterrent to those considering a career in special education.

8. State policies are not geared toward increasing the quality and quantity of math and science teachers.

While states have put in place many boutique initiatives to address these shortages, structural adjustments would provide greater yield.

- By not focusing on the equitable distribution of teachers, states shortchange the neediest children of qualified math and science teachers. Only 12 states have made even some progress to achieve this goal.
- Alternate route programs provide excellent means by which to recruit and prepare mid-career professionals with backgrounds in science and math. 32 states do not allow someone to demonstrate subject-matter knowledge by means of a test in lieu of their requirement of a major in the subject.
- The harder it is for teachers to move between states, the harder it is for a qualified math and science teacher to find a new job. Yet 23 states attach lots of strings before issuing an equivalent license to a teacher moving from out of state. Even worse, a qualified math and science teacher trying to find a new job but who was prepared in an alternate route may be greeted with an unwelcome sign in 38 states.
- Perhaps most key is the reality that there is such a shortage of math and science teachers because they can earn so much more money in other professions with these skills. 28 states support differential pay initiatives for teachers in shortage areas.
9. States’ alternate routes to teacher certification lack "truth in advertising."

Despite the perception of a proliferation of alternate routes, in reality, alternate routes often mirror traditional routes or appear to be emergency certificates in disguise.

- Of the 48 states that claim to offer alternate routes, only 6 states offer a genuine alternate route to licensure. 15 states offer alternate route programs that need significant revision, while 27 states offer disingenuous alternate routes that more closely resemble traditional or emergency routes than alternatives.
- By and large, alternate routes are not designed to meet the needs of nontraditional candidates. Only 16 states have admissions criteria that are flexible and allow individuals to demonstrate content knowledge by passing an examination.
- Only 4 states require alternate route programs to measure and report the academic achievement of the students of alternate route teachers.

10. The interests of adults frequently come before the needs of the children.

Far too many accommodations are made for teachers in the areas of testing, tenure and evaluations, risking the possibility that too many children could suffer significant academic harm from a bad teacher.

- Only 3 states require teachers to pass licensure examinations before beginning to teach, with many states allowing three or more years to pass exams. This proves unfair to the students in these teachers’ classrooms, who may not be learning from knowledgeable educators.
- Only 4 states require classroom effectiveness to be the preponderant criterion for evaluating teacher performance, with other states giving equal weight to factors such as attending faculty meetings.
- With the exception of only 2 states, teachers are not required to work for at least 5 years before earning tenure—which makes it much more difficult to dismiss them if they are ineffective.
- By not judging teacher preparation programs on the classroom effectiveness of their graduates, states are allowing failing programs to continue to produce teachers who may do more harm than good in the classroom. Only 9 states use data regarding the effectiveness of program graduates as a means of determining whether to approve the programs.
- Perpetuating the vicious cycle of poverty, few states have set any benchmarks for recruiting and retaining teachers for high-needs schools.