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Crackdowns on Emergency Licenses Begin As Teacher Shortages Loom

By Ann Bradley

This is the last installment in a five-part series about the nation's supply of and demand for qualified teachers. Read ["About This Series,"](#) below.

Correction:

This story incorrectly described Texas' temporary classroom assignment permits. The permits, which allow people to teach subjects outside their certification areas for up to four class periods, require that teachers have six semester hours of coursework in the area to be taught.

Read an accompanying state-by-state chart, ["Lacking Licenses,"](#) which gives percentages of newly hired teachers unlicensed in their main assignment fields.

Read our story, ["Prospective Teachers' SAT](#)

By this coming fall, New York has decreed, the worst-performing schools in the state won't be allowed to employ any new teachers with temporary licenses. And by September 2003, the practice will be outlawed altogether.

New York is among a handful of states attempting to crack down on the hiring of teachers without full qualifications. The long-standing practice--known by a variety of terms, including emergency licensure--is used to fill classrooms when teachers trained to teach a particular subject can't be found, or when teacher-candidates haven't passed a required test or finished their coursework.

Now, as districts face the need to hire more than 2 million new teachers over the next decade, critics of emergency licensure fear it will spark a resurgence to stock classrooms with minimally qualified "warm bodies." The concern is more acute in urban and rural schools serving minority and poor children.

Yet, even as New York and Maryland are moving to ensure that students are taught by fully prepared teachers, other states have considered lowering the bar. In Arizona, the state Senate last month defeated a bill that would have allowed districts to hire unlicensed "associate teachers."

The debate over the bill underscores the tensions that arise over teacher licensure. The issue bitterly divides into camps those who argue that licensure is a barrier unrelated to a person's ability to teach and those who insist that it provides a quality-assurance

HELP WANTED:
2 Million Teachers

About This Series

Part 5, April 7, 1999:

"Crackdowns on Emergency Licenses Begin as Teacher Shortages Loom."

Part 4, March 31, 1999:

["Out-of-Field Teaching Runs Rampant."](#)

Part 3, March 24, 1999:

- ["All Classes of Spec. Ed. Teachers in Demand Throughout Nation";](#)

- ["Burgeoning Nevada District Concentrates on 'Growing' Its Own";](#)

- ["Prospective Teachers in Rural Areas Tune In to Satellite Classes."](#)

Part 2, March 17, 1999:

["New Teachers Abandon Field at High Rate."](#)

Part 1, March 10, 1999:

["States' Uneven Teacher Supply Complicates Staffing of Schools."](#)

[Scores Higher Than Believed, Study Finds.](#) March 10, 1999.

mechanism.

Each side can point to state laws reflecting its view. Some states, such as Connecticut, have rigorous licensing requirements, while others permit a broad range of hiring. In Texas, for example, even people who fail the state test can continue to teach for one year.

["Riley: ESEA Plan Will Push Teacher Quality."](#) Feb. 17, 1999.

Nationwide, more than one-fourth of newly hired teachers enter the profession without having fully met state licensing standards, according to the National Commission on Teaching & America's Future. Twelve percent of new teachers are hired with no license at all, while another 15 percent hold temporary, provisional, or emergency licenses.

As part of its push for higher academic standards, the American Federation of Teachers has called for ending emergency licensure.

On the Web

["Riley Outlines Licensure Plan for Teachers."](#) Feb. 2, 1999.

Read ["It's the Teachers, Stupid."](#) a provocative column by David Horowitz, *Salon Magazine*, February 1997. Horowitz is not shy about assigning blame for the low standards in American schools: "Let's stop beating around the bush: The source of our national educational crisis is a massive failure of teachers to teach." Then, read one teacher's [reaction](#) to the column.

["Higher Standards for Teacher Training."](#) from the September/October 1998, *Policy Review*. Author Eugene W. Hickok, Pennsylvania's secretary of education, discusses Pennsylvania's initiative to ensure quality teachers.

["States Anteing Up Supplements to Teachers Certified by Board."](#) Nov. 18, 1998.

PHOTO: Clark County, Nev., school board member Bill Hanlon finds his own state's licensure requirements inadequate: Taking one science class in the past 15 years qualifies him to teach the subject.

--Stewart Bowman

["Licensure Pact Pays Dividends for Teaching."](#) May 21, 1997.