

## Resource 5. Approaches to Teacher Leader Licensure and Endorsement

One clear lever that states have for influencing teacher leadership is licensure: States set license types and requirements for all educators, including the education, professional learning, and other activities that educators must have for each license type. For districts, teacher leader licenses can provide a clear guide for differentiated compensation structures and may help inform teacher leader hiring. Licensure policies vary widely across states, including whether or not they include a specific license type for teacher leaders. To date, most teacher leader roles have not been linked to a specific license type (beyond a traditional teaching license). Many states have recently explored how they might use teacher leader licensure and endorsements to support and incentivize local teacher leadership roles. Likewise, states have begun to explore how they might use teacher leader licenses to set clear, consistent expectations about the basic knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary to be successful in these roles. For districts, aligning teacher leader roles with licensure may help to simplify compensation decisions (if the license is tied to a specific pay scale).

### Terminology

*License:* overall teaching certification

*Endorsement:* additional certification for teaching in specific content areas or settings (e.g., elementary education, secondary science, special education)

*Microcredential:* badge or certificate demonstrating specific knowledge or skills, which can be used for licensure, endorsements, or compensation

This resource describes the current requirements for teacher leader licenses, along with relevant state examples. In addition, this resource presents overarching considerations for states about designing teacher leader licenses that can foster and support local teacher leadership roles. For more information about teacher leader licenses available, see the Education Commission of the States scan at <https://www.ecs.org/50-state-comparison-teacher-leadership-and-licensure-advancement/>.

### Teacher Leader License Types

Teacher leader licenses may be general or specific. States, districts, and stakeholders involved in designing teacher leader licenses should first clarify what types of teacher leader roles are to be linked to licensure and how licensure can be useful.

**General licenses** can afford flexibility, but they may be underutilized if clarity is lacking on how they might help teacher leaders grow or advance. [Arkansas](#) has a four-tiered teacher license structure that includes two license levels for teacher leaders. The *lead professional educator license* does not require actual experience in teacher leader roles and is designed to be an entry-level license for new teacher leaders. The *master professional educator license* does require actual experience in teacher leader roles and demonstrated effectiveness; this license may expand opportunities for experienced teacher leaders that still enable them to directly serve students and schools.

**Specific licenses** may be a part of efforts to scale specific teacher leader models while also affording flexibility by outlining general categories instead of specific roles. For example, a state could include teacher leader licensure categories such as lead teachers, coaches, and content experts. Specific licenses can also help define differentiated hiring criteria for teacher leader roles.

## Teacher Leader License Requirements

There are three major types of current state requirements for teacher leadership licensure:

- Teaching experience
- Graduate coursework or degree
- Teacher leader competency assessment

### Teaching Experience

For teacher leadership roles that include support for novice teachers (such as instructional coaches or mentors), it is important that the teacher leaders are experienced and effective educators. While it may not be necessary that other teacher leadership roles are filled by educators with many years of experience, experienced teachers may bring more informed and varied perspectives to roles such as those of policy advisors, professional development leads, or content leads than effective teachers with more limited experience. Some states may consider creating a teacher leader license as part of a tiered licensure system partially based on years of experience. For schools and districts, aligning teacher leader roles to a teacher leader license requiring multiple years of experience may help prevent younger teachers from advancing too quickly and creating high turnover rates among full-time classroom teachers.

- **New Jersey** offers a teacher leader endorsement that is available to teachers who are licensed in the state, have at least 3 years of teaching experience, and have completed a teacher leadership program of study. More information is available at [ftp://www.njleg.state.nj.us/20142015/S0500/165\\_I1.HTM](ftp://www.njleg.state.nj.us/20142015/S0500/165_I1.HTM).
- **Ohio** offers a senior professional educator license to teachers who are licensed in the state and who have 9 years of teaching experience under a standard renewable license. Applicants also must hold a master's degree, demonstrate effective practice through *accomplished* or *distinguished* performance evaluation ratings, successfully complete the Master Teacher portfolio, and achieve designation as a Master Teacher. More information is available at <http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Teaching/Licensure/Audiences/Senior-Professional-Educator-and-Lead-Professional>.
- **Oregon** offers a teacher leader license to teachers who are licensed in the state and who have at least 5 years of continuous teaching experience before applying for the license. In addition, applicants must have evaluation ratings of *effective* or *highly effective* from 2 of the last 5 years of experience and must submit a portfolio of current leadership practices. More information is available at [https://www.oregon.gov/tspc/Pages/Licensing/Teacher\\_Leader\\_License.aspx](https://www.oregon.gov/tspc/Pages/Licensing/Teacher_Leader_License.aspx).

## Graduate Coursework

For teacher leader roles that focus on specific content or subject areas, earning graduate coursework in that specific subject may demonstrate deep content knowledge and understanding. For teacher leader roles that focus on more general instructional practices (such as mentors or team leads), earning graduate coursework in education leadership may demonstrate the key skills necessary for these positions. Many institutions of higher education have created specific teacher leadership graduate programs to support teachers' ongoing development; however, few states require completion of a teacher leadership program to earn a teacher leader license.

Some states also offer advanced coursework aligned with National Board Certification. National Board Certification is a voluntary, performance-based, and peer-reviewed process through which teachers can demonstrate their efficacy. Many states allow National Board Certification to count toward or contribute to a standard teaching license renewal.

- **Louisiana** enables teachers to earn a teacher leader endorsement by completing a state-approved teacher leadership program that is aligned with the Louisiana Educational Leadership Standards and includes at least six graduate credit hours. More information is available at [https://www.teachlouisiana.net/pdf/LOUISIANA\\_DEPARTMENT\\_OF\\_EDUCATION\\_ADD-ON\\_CERTIFICATION-PROVIDERS.pdf](https://www.teachlouisiana.net/pdf/LOUISIANA_DEPARTMENT_OF_EDUCATION_ADD-ON_CERTIFICATION-PROVIDERS.pdf) and [https://www.teachlouisiana.net/pdf/teacherleader\\_proposal.pdf](https://www.teachlouisiana.net/pdf/teacherleader_proposal.pdf).
- **New Jersey** offers a teacher leader endorsement to teachers who are licensed in the state and who have completed a teacher leadership program of study aligned to the Teacher Leader Model Standards that includes at least 12 graduate credit hours. Applicants also must have at least 3 years of teaching experience. More information is available at [ftp://www.njleg.state.nj.us/20142015/S0500/165\\_I1.HTM](ftp://www.njleg.state.nj.us/20142015/S0500/165_I1.HTM)
- **Ohio** offers a senior professional educator license to teachers who are licensed in the state and who hold a master's degree. Applicants also must have 9 years of teaching experience under a standard renewable license. In addition, applicants must hold a master's degree, demonstrate effective practice through *accomplished* or *distinguished* performance evaluation ratings, successfully complete the Master Teacher portfolio, and achieve designation as a Master Teacher. More information is available at <http://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Teaching/Licensure/Audiences/Senior-Professional-Educator-and-Lead-Professional>
- **Oregon** offers a teacher leader license to teachers who are licensed in the state and who have at least 5 years continuous teaching experience before applying for the license. In addition, applicants must have evaluation ratings of *effective* or *highly effective* from 2 of the last 5 years of experience and must submit a portfolio of current leadership practices. More information is available at [https://www.oregon.gov/tspc/Pages/Licensing/Teacher\\_Leader\\_License.aspx](https://www.oregon.gov/tspc/Pages/Licensing/Teacher_Leader_License.aspx).

## Teacher Leader Competency Assessment

Specific competencies are associated with many teacher leader roles that extend beyond the competencies required for a typical classroom teacher position. Over the past several years, several skills frameworks (e.g., standards or assessments) have been developed to capture these

competencies. States can require assessments of specific competencies for teacher leader licensure, allowing states to refine the selection criteria for eligible candidates for specific kinds of teacher leader roles across the state.

- **Oregon** offers a teacher leader license to teachers who are licensed in the state and who submit a portfolio of current leadership practices demonstrating evidence of professional leadership practices for 12 of the 37 total elements in the state teacher leader evaluation rubric. The evidence must be from the 5 years of experience before the application. Applicants also must have at least 5 years of continuous teaching experience before applying for the license, and they must have evaluation ratings of *effective* or *highly effective* from 2 of the last 5 years of experience. More information is available at [https://www.oregon.gov/tspc/Pages/Licensing/Teacher\\_Leader\\_License.aspx](https://www.oregon.gov/tspc/Pages/Licensing/Teacher_Leader_License.aspx).

### Considerations for Teacher Leader License Design

Teacher leader licenses can be used for many reasons. States may consider the following approaches to teacher leader licenses:

- **Create teacher leader licenses that are both specific and flexible.** States can set requirements for teacher leader licenses that align with the competencies for teacher leader roles to refine selection criteria. States can adopt teacher leader standards as part of the foundation for these competencies (for more information, see [Resource 2: Teacher Leader Role Profiles](#)). States can also use microcredentials or portfolios (including National Board Certification) as evidence of specific competencies. States may want to study the different teacher leadership models currently being used across the state to understand what roles the state may desire to include or further refine through licensure. Alternatively, the state may design teacher leader licensure to reflect roles that the state desires to spread or foster.
- **Use teacher leader licensure to encourage development of a career ladder.** States may integrate one or more teacher leader licenses into a tiered licensure model that helps moderate teacher career pathways. While states can signal support for local teacher leadership by establishing a generic teacher leader license, it is important for states to articulate associated roles that could be created for actual advancement. If there are too few or too limited teacher leadership roles available, teachers may not have incentives to seek teacher leader licenses. States may want to gather input from teachers and district leaders on how they might use teacher leader licensure and what value it might have before they make design decisions.
- **Align teacher leadership with advanced degree attainment or programs of study.** States may require teachers to complete a state-approved advanced degree or program of study, which can allow the state to set detailed requirements for teacher leader licensure. This may be helpful for states in which many teacher leader roles are state funded (either directly or through grants to districts), because the state can require teacher leader licenses for these roles.