

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# MEANINGFUL CREDENTIAL RENEWAL

## A Policy Proposal to Strengthen Teaching Quality in California

## CALIFORNIA EDUCATION PROGRAM

APRIL 2011

*This paper is part of a nonpartisan project to identify specific state-level policy changes that could have a significant impact on teaching quality and be accomplished in a constrained fiscal environment. Of course, many aspects of California's teacher development system could be strengthened, better funded, or otherwise changed for the better. This proposal focuses on teacher credential renewal because it is an underutilized state policy lever that could be enhanced significantly and at relatively low cost.*

Teacher effectiveness is known to be a critical factor in student learning and success. California has made some notable efforts to strengthen teaching, but the most coherent state-level initiatives have been limited to the earliest stages of teachers' careers. After the credentialing and induction phase, state policy does little to ensure teaching quality or foster continual improvement. This report argues the state should play a stronger role in strengthening teaching quality beyond these early phases.

One underutilized policy lever for doing so is the renewal of the Clear teaching credential. Currently, teachers renew their Clear credentials every five years by paying a fee to the state—nothing more. This is a missed opportunity for the state both in terms of accountability and improvement. By implementing a new process—local review—at the point of renewal, the state could ensure that teachers are demonstrating acceptable levels of performance and professional growth, while providing districts and teachers a structure for improving instructional practice.

In the new process for credential renewal proposed here, local panels would review teacher professional portfolios and use the results of these reviews as the basis for recommending renewal of teacher Clear credentials every five years. Electronic portfolios would contain information about:

1. Growth in student learning (with a variety of allowed sources of assessment data);
2. Teaching performance in the classroom, as documented by the principal and other instructional experts; and
3. The teacher's individual efforts to improve his or her teaching practice and grow professionally.

Local panels would be composed of three individuals who are selected locally according to state-established criteria and who collectively represent the interests of the surrounding education community. Working from state-developed rubrics (or locally developed rubrics with state approval), local panels would review portfolios and recommend to California's Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) that teachers' Clear credentials be

renewed for the full five years, renewed provisionally for up to one year, or not be renewed at all.

In *all* cases, the review panels would provide teachers with written feedback about the portfolios and their decisions. For teachers whose credentials are provisionally renewed, the panels would identify areas for improvement. These teachers would work with their districts to develop individualized intervention and assistance plans to make the necessary improvements over the course of one year. After this period, teachers would approach their local panel again to seek credential renewal. For teachers not recommended for renewal, the Clear credential would expire. (Teachers with expired credentials could seek a

provisional credential directly from CTC via a similar portfolio-review process.)

As a first step toward implementing this plan, we recommend the state fund and evaluate a pilot of the review panel process in a small sample of districts and use the evaluation results to refine the process before statewide implementation.

Reforming the credential renewal process as suggested here would strengthen the state role in ensuring teaching quality while maintaining local authority and influence over the process.



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