

DEMYSTIFYING THE PATHWAYS TO FULL TEACHER LICENSURE: HOW DO I BECOME A TEACHER IN NORTH CAROLINA?



PUBLIC SCHOOL FORUM OF NC
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As in other highly skilled careers, licensure requirements were put in place to ensure that candidates that enter the teaching profession are competent and effective.¹ Unfortunately, licensure requirements can change from year to year and vary depending on the subject area in which a candidate plans to teach, making the pathway to obtaining full teaching licensure seem a bit unclear at times. This brief provides an overview of current North Carolina teacher licensure requirements by answering the following questions:

- 1 Who Sets the Licensure and Exam Requirements?**
- 2 What are the Pathways to Full Licensure?**
- 3 What are the Steps for Gaining Full Licensure?**

WHO SETS THE LICENSURE AND EXAM REQUIREMENTS?

Like most states, North Carolina requires teacher candidates to meet certain licensure requirements. The State Board of Education (SBE) governs all teacher licensure requirements and is responsible for adopting “rules for the issuance, renewal, and extension of all licenses.”² However, it is legally mandated that the board must require candidates to demonstrate their “academic and professional preparation” by passing an appropriate and adequate standard licensure examination.³ Thus, the SBE is tasked with establishing the appropriate examinations and prescribed minimum score that a candidate must achieve in order to pass the exam and obtain a license.⁴ In 2017, the state established the Professional Educator Preparation and Standards Commission (PEPSC) to aid the board in setting the standards and requirements for licensure and other aspects of educator preparation.⁵

The State Board has adopted [the following exams](#) as part of North Carolina’s teacher licensure system.⁶

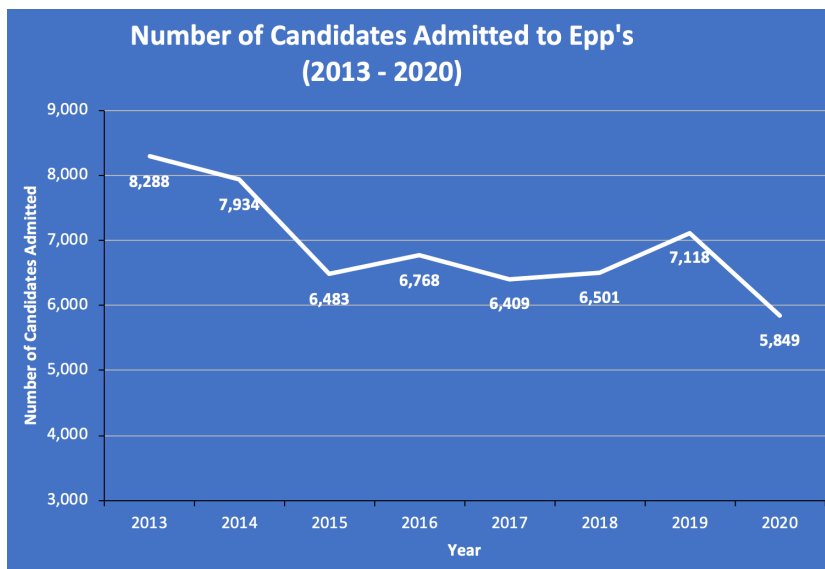
- Pearson Test (Foundations of Reading)
- Praxis II (Subject-specific licensure tests)
- Mathematics CKT
- edTPA/ PPAT

PEPSC is tasked with making rule recommendations regarding professional standards for teaching including admission and course requirements for educator preparation programs (EPPs), preservice training requirements and testing requirements to the State Board of Education for approval. The commission is composed of experts from the field of education, most of whom are appointed by the North Carolina General Assembly based on their commitment to improving the teaching profession and student achievement.⁷ Members, chosen to represent the racial, geographic, and gender diversity of the state, – with the exception of at large members – must have been engaged in the profession of teaching and serve two-year terms.⁸

WHAT ARE THE PATHWAYS TO TEACHER LICENSURE IN NORTH CAROLINA?

Over the past several years, North Carolina has seen a decrease in the number of candidates entering the teaching profession. According to DPI's EPP Performance dashboard, in 2020, EPPs across the state admitted a total of 5,849 candidates. This is a stark difference from the 8,288 candidates admitted in 2013.⁹ Thus, policy makers and education stakeholders must understand the current pathways to become a teacher in order to identify possible barriers and solutions for addressing teacher shortages.¹⁰

In North Carolina, there are two prominent routes to teacher licensure, the **Traditional** and **Alternative** pathways. While both pathways offer candidates the opportunity to receive the necessary preparation to be classroom teachers, there are some key differences that should be understood.



Source: Department of Public Instruction, EPP Performance Dashboard, retrieved from <https://www.dpi.nc.gov/educators/educator-preparation/epp-performance>

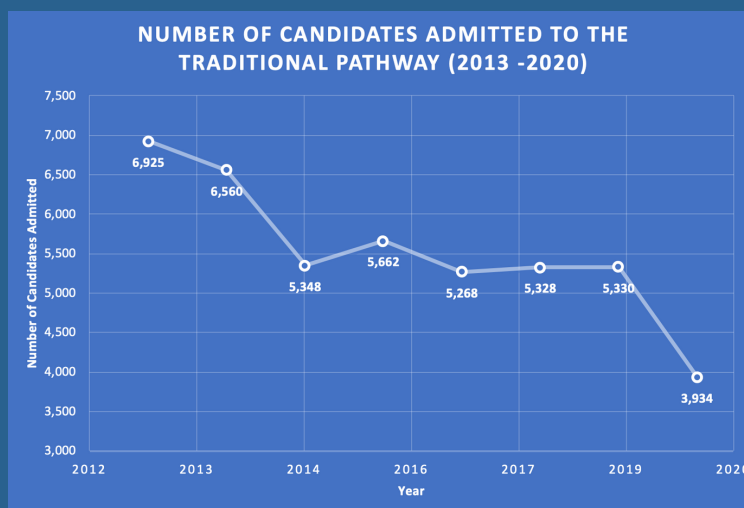
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THE TRADITIONAL PATHWAY

The traditional pathway is the route that comes to mind for most when thinking about the process of becoming a teacher. This pathway requires that candidates gain entry into and graduate from an Educator Preparation Program (EPP) before they begin teaching in an Local Education Agency (LEA). Currently, there are fifteen public and thirty-two private North Carolina institutions of higher learning with approved EPPs. Candidates will find a complete list of all approved Educator Preparation programs on the Department of Public Instruction's Educator Preparation website.

Currently, the number of candidates entering the teaching profession through the traditional pathway has declined steadily in recent years, with 6,925 candidates being admitted in 2013 and then decreasing by almost half (3,934 candidates) in 2020.¹¹



Source: Department of Public Instruction, EPP Performance Dashboard, retrieved from [here](#).

MASTER OF ARTS IN TEACHING (MAT)

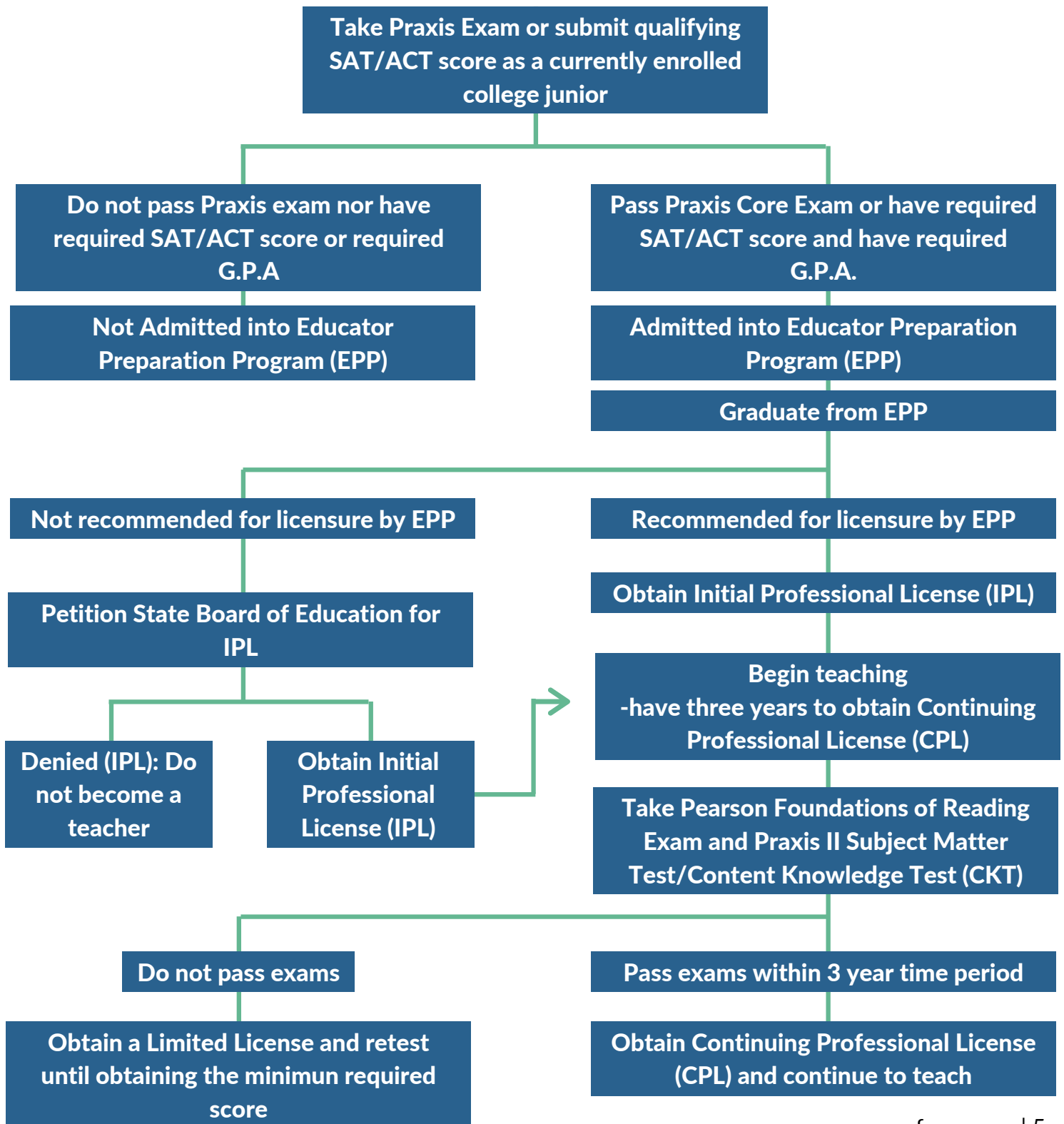
Also, it is important to note that candidates can also pursue a Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) through a MAT program. A MAT is a graduate degree and licensure program for those who have already earned a bachelor's degree. The program, in general, may require approximately 40 semester hours and is composed of professional education, pedagogy, and content area courses. There are typically two phases in the program. The initial licensure phase may end with a college/university recommendation of the candidate for an A-level (initial level) license. It is followed by a second phase that concludes with the candidate receiving the master's degree and being recommended for an M-level (master's degree level) license.

Source: Department of Public Instruction, Pathways to Teaching, retrieved from [here](#)

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TRADITIONAL PATHWAY TO TEACHING IN NORTH CAROLINA



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AN ALTERNATIVE PATHWAY: THE RESIDENCY MODEL

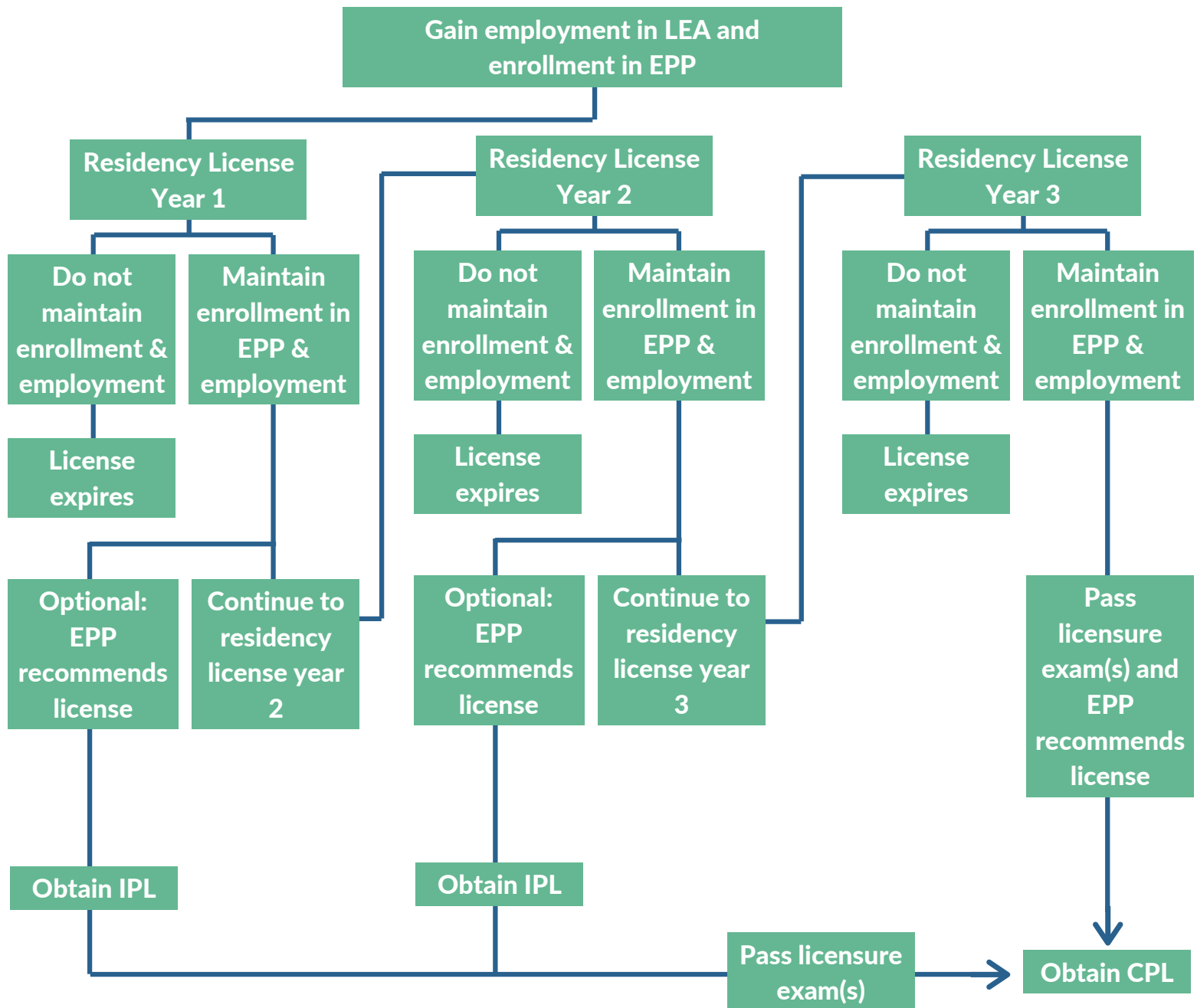
The residency model, which recently replaced lateral entry as an alternative pathway to teaching, offers professionals who are looking for a mid-career change or those who may not have realized their passion for teaching during their undergraduate career an opportunity to enter the teaching profession. With this pathway, after being hired by a North Carolina LEA and affiliating with an EPP, candidates obtain a Residency License (RL), which is a one-year license that is renewable twice prior to obtaining full licensure, and allows candidates with bachelor degrees to teach while striving to meet all licensure requirements in order to become fully licensed. You can find all current state approved residency programs through DPI's [website](#).¹²

Although each program is state approved, it is important to learn about the different characteristics of each program such as the specific areas of licensure that the program is approved to prepare candidates to obtain or if the program is online or based in North Carolina. Unlike the traditional pathway, the number of candidates entering the profession through the residency pathway has grown with a sharp increase from 2017 to 2020.¹³



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THE RESIDENCY MODEL



WHAT ARE THE STEPS FOR OBTAINING FULL LICENSURE?

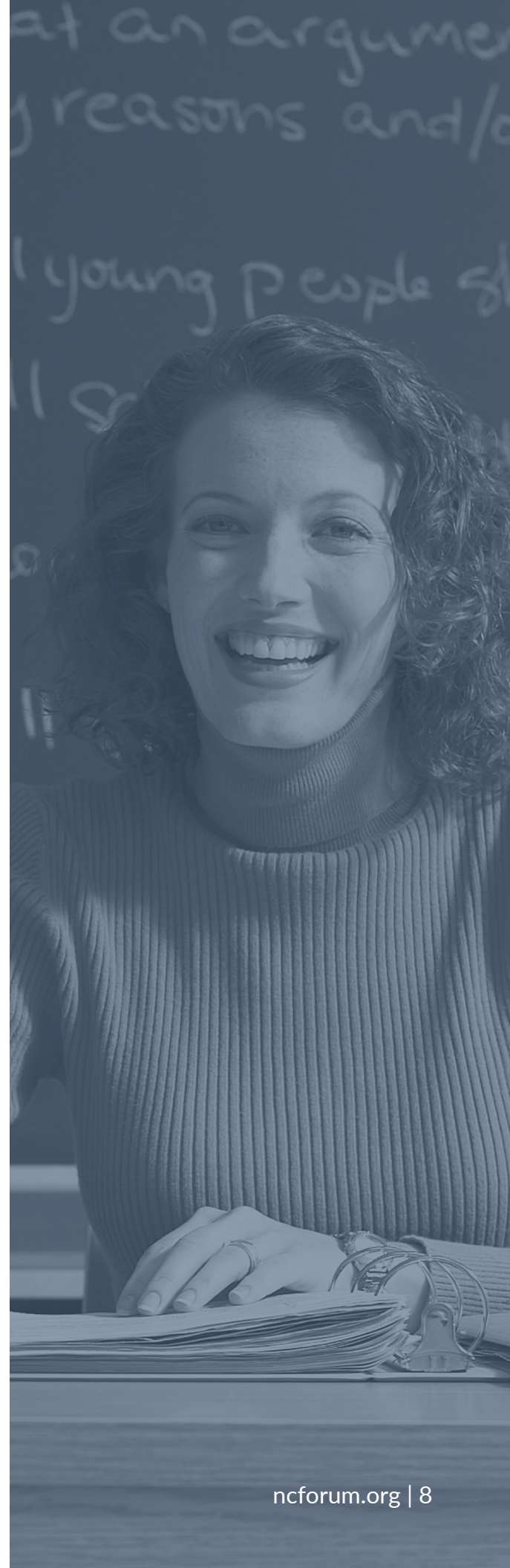
As in other professions, achieving full licensure allows teachers to teach in any district in the state in the subject area of which they are licensed. Teachers in North Carolina must complete the following steps to obtain full licensure.

Step 1: Meet Coursework Requirements

Step 2: Obtain Initial Professional License (IPL)

Step 3: Obtain Continuing Professional License (CPL)

No matter which pathway they follow, teachers must obtain two levels of licensure to become a fully licensed teacher in North Carolina: the Initial Professional License (IPL) followed by the Continuing Professional License (CPL).





THE FIRST STEP: MEET COURSEWORK REQUIREMENTS

The first requirement in gaining full teacher licensure in North Carolina is receiving appropriate coursework from a state approved and accredited educator preparation program (EPP). Educator preparation programs are entities that prepare, train, and recommend undergraduate and graduate candidates for teacher licensure.¹⁴ Currently, there are 55 approved EPP programs in North Carolina. Both pathways require that candidates receive course work from and be enrolled in an accredited EPP, but there are some notable differences.

TRADITIONAL PATHWAY

Candidates taking the traditional pathway gain entry into an EPP by passing the Praxis I Core Academic Skills for Educators test. This test is typically taken before their junior year at a college or university, but candidates can be exempt from taking the Praxis I Core by meeting a minimum score on the SAT or ACT.¹⁵ Much like the function of the SAT and ACT for four-year colleges, this test was designed to assess a teacher candidate's basic skills and content knowledge in reading, writing, and mathematics.¹⁶ Once accepted into an EPP, candidates are full time students in the program and follow a course of study that includes a student teaching experience, designed by the respective program to prepare candidates to meet licensure requirements.

ALTERNATIVE PATHWAY

Candidates taking the alternative route are still required to receive the necessary coursework from and be enrolled in an approved and accredited EPP. However, in this pathway, candidates are employed by a LEA while simultaneously completing any necessary course work at an approved EPP before they can obtain full licensure.¹⁷ Another difference is that candidates taking this pathway have the flexibility to take different courses at different EPPs to fit their schedule. The affiliated EPP will provide candidates with an "Individual Program of Study" (IPS). The IPS will detail the specific competencies and options for courses to meet licensing requirements.¹⁸ Note that it is important for each candidate to make sure that coursework is transferable.



THE SECOND STEP: OBTAIN AN INITIAL PROFESSIONAL LICENSE (IPL)

Teachers must obtain the Initial Professional License (IPL), a three-year nonrenewable license.¹⁹ No matter the pathway taken, candidates must be recommended by their respective EPP in order to obtain their license.²⁰ However there are some differences in how each pathway becomes eligible for IPL recommendation.

TRADITIONAL PATHWAY

A candidate taking the traditional pathway must receive a recommendation from their respective EPP after completing all requirements. Each EPP has its own requirements that candidates must meet in order to be recommended for this license, which may include passing licensure exams and coursework requirements. With this in mind, it is imperative that candidates inquire about their respective EPPs recommendations requirements.

ALTERNATIVE PATHWAY

Alternative pathway candidates must be recommended by their respective EPP to obtain an IPL but in order to be recommended these candidates must meet all testing requirements. These testing requirements differ depending on the subject area. If the candidate does not receive a recommendation from their respective EPP, the candidate can still obtain their IPL if an LEA that intends to hire them successfully petitions the State Board of Education.²¹ After obtaining an IPL, candidates then have three years to earn their CPL. If the candidate has taken the traditional pathway, obtaining an IPL allows them to begin teaching in an LEA.



THE THIRD AND FINAL STEP: OBTAIN A CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL LICENSE (CPL)

Once a teacher has obtained their IPL, they are then eligible to begin the process of obtaining their Continuing Professional License (CPL). The CPL is a five-year renewable license issued to teachers who have at least three years of experience (either in NC or verified experience from another state), have completed a beginning teacher support program (if required) and passed all SBE-approved, or comparable, licensure exams required for the license(s).²² When a candidate has obtained their CPL, they are fully licensed to teach in North Carolina and will only have to renew their license in the appropriate time frame.

Currently, standardized licensure exams play a significant role in North Carolina's licensure requirements because these exams are widely accepted as a "dependable mechanism for identifying those who have met particular standards."²³ All NC teachers must *attempt* to pass the required licensure exams to obtain their CPL during their first year of teaching.²⁴ While they do not have to *succeed* in passing all required exams during their first year of teaching, all teachers must obtain passing scores on all required exams by the third year teaching in order to be eligible for the CPL.²⁵

LIMITED LICENSE (LL)

Senate Bill 219 created a non-renewable Limited License for current teachers who have an IPL but have not been able to pass the necessary licensure test(s) in the allotted period of 3 years and, thus, do not qualify for a CPL. This non-renewable Limited License must be requested by the local board of education employing or seeking to employ said teacher and the license is only valid for employment in the school district for which it was applied.

CONCLUSION

North Carolina offers two different pathways for full teacher licensure. However, the current number of individuals engaged in these pathways will not meet the increasing demand for educators across our state. The State Board of Education and PEPSC play important roles in governing licensing standards and requirements for teachers, and North Carolina must continue to explore ways to ensure that our schools are staffed with the qualified, licensed educators we need.

Understanding the pathways to licensure and potential barriers is an important step in the process of improving the recruitment and retention of teachers in North Carolina. The Public School Forum of NC will release additional briefs on the following topics related to teacher preparation and licensure in the coming months:

- Teacher Licensure vs. Teacher Effectiveness
- Trends in the NC Teacher Pipeline
- The Impact of Licensure Requirements on Candidates of Color entering the Teaching profession

These briefs will continue to elevate the discussion on barriers to entry and opportunities to recruit and retain a more diverse and effective teacher workforce in North Carolina.



APPENDIX

Pearson Test (Foundations of Reading)

The Foundations of Reading assessment is specifically required for teachers pursuing an Elementary Education and Exceptional Children - General Curriculum (EC-GC) license.²⁶ In order for these candidates to receive their CPL they must achieve a passing score on this exam before the end of their 3rd year teaching with their IPL. This assessment focuses on measuring teachers' skills in the development, instruction, and assessment of reading by covering essential components of reading development and best practices in reading instruction and assessment.²⁷ It is a computer-based test and is administered at a testing center.²⁸

Praxis II (Subject-specific licensure tests)

Praxis II exams are taken after graduation from an EPP and prior to applying for a Continuing Professional License (CPL). These exams measure teachers' content knowledge of specific subjects that they plan to teach and include over 90 different subject areas ranging from agriculture to world languages. Teachers must take the Praxis II exams as part of the teacher licensing and certification process required by North Carolina, however, the number and version of Praxis II subject specific tests that are required depends on the certification area that they are pursuing.²⁹ As with Praxis I exams, these are computer-based and administered at testing sites across the state and are only offered in English, with an option for extended testing time for non-native English speakers.³⁰

Mathematics CKT

The Praxis Elementary Education: Content Knowledge for Teaching (CKT) was designed to measure prospective elementary education teachers' mathematics content knowledge. Twenty percent of the questions on this test measure curriculum content knowledge while 80 percent of the questions measure the knowledge needed to teach the curriculum.³¹ This design element was the basis for the switch from the Praxis II subject specific math test, and North Carolina policymakers have noted that they believe the CKT test may be a better assessment of a candidate's ability to effectively teach the skills needed to develop a strong understanding of mathematics content in elementary grades.

APPENDIX

edTPA

The Educator Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA) is a teacher candidate performance-based assessment system developed by Stanford University to assess teacher candidates' readiness to teach, as well as to provide valid and reliable assessment data for program evaluation and continuous program improvement.³² Unlike most teacher licensure exams, the edTPA requires a teacher candidate to assemble a portfolio during their student teaching experience that consists of curriculum plans, video clips of instruction, student work samples, and candidates' reflective commentaries.³³ Once completed, these portfolios are scored by trained professionals from the field of education (i.e. trained university faculty) who evaluate them using a rubric. Candidates receive a score of 1 to 5 on each task, with 1 signaling that the candidate is struggling and is not ready to teach and 5 signaling that the candidate is highly accomplished.³⁴

New edTPA/PPAT Requirement

As of September 2019, teacher candidates in North Carolina are now required to pass the edTPA or PPAT exam to obtain their CPL. This requirement was established by law that mandates that the SBE require that teacher candidates pass a pedagogical assessment. To adhere to this legislative requirement, as with the selection of other assessments, experts in the field conducted research to determine if the test was appropriate.

PPAT

The PPAT, similarly to the edTPA, is a teacher performance assessment and is an alternative for the evaluation of teacher candidates' pedagogical skills.³⁵ This assessment evaluates the test takers ability to impact student learning by demonstrating that they have mastered the basic pedagogical content knowledge and application in the classroom to be an effective entry level teacher.³⁶ As with the edTPA, the PPAT requires that teacher candidates submit both written commentary and artifacts that are linked to their written commentaries.³⁷ However, unlike the edTPA, the PPAT allows students to have a more flexible submission schedule so that they are able to submit their tasks throughout their student-teaching experience.³⁸

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Endnotes

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