

# Oklahoma Teacher Shortage Task Force Offers Recommendations—December 22, 2015

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Over 940 emergency credentials have been issued this year by the Oklahoma State Department of Education (OSDE) as a result of the statewide teacher shortage. A preliminary report issued December 10 by a state task force offers recommendations that aim to tackle the problem on multiple fronts.

The task force, formed by the OSDE to identify and recommend strategies for reducing the shortage, includes more than 60 legislators, OSDE staff, educators, business leaders, teacher organizations, education advocacy groups, and other community-based stakeholders. I represent teacher preparation programs on the task force, particularly through my role as president of the Oklahoma Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (OACTE), a state affiliate of AACTE.

The initial meeting of the task force was held in September, and we had to work fast to create an actionable plan by the December 11 legislative deadline of the state. We formed three working groups to address the legislative, community, and internal OSDE roles in stemming the shortage. Two other members of OACTE joined me on the legislative working group.

Overall, the task force came up with the following recommendations:

1. **Retired Teachers as Mentors** – The state’s Teacher Residency Program requires mentors for new teachers, which boosts the novices’ likelihood of staying in the classroom. These mentors currently are required to be full-time employees, but finding enough mentors is a struggle for many schools. *Recommendation:* Amend the statute to allow retired teachers to serve as mentors.
2. **Scholarship for Certification Exam Fees** – One barrier to entry into the teaching profession is the cost-prohibitive nature of the three required certification exams. *Recommendation:* Create a scholarship program and fund in statute to provide for a one-time scholarship for test takers, based on financial need.
3. **Recognition of Out-of-State Certification** – Oklahoma has one of the country’s most stringent certification laws, requiring out-of-state teachers to pass the three exams in order to receive Oklahoma certification, although a new state law is easing that restriction by

allowing teachers with more than 5 years' experience to skip the exams. *Recommendation:* Remove the remaining restriction requiring 5 years of experience in order to allow any certified teacher from another state to be certified in Oklahoma regardless of teaching experience.

4. **Approved Work Experience Exempting GPA Requirement** – Current law requires a candidate for alternative certification to have a college grade-point average (GPA) of 2.5 on a 4.0 scale and also pass the state's three certification exams. *Recommendation:* Allow the OSDE to create a rubric by which an alternative certification candidate's work experience can be evaluated and substituted for the GPA requirement.
5. **Increased Hours for Adjunct Teachers** – Current law limits an adjunct teacher to 90 hours of teaching per semester. *Recommendation:* Increase limit to 270 hours.
6. **Cost and Comparability of Certification Exams** – Current exams are costly and not comparable with other states' tests. *Recommendation:* Explore legislative solutions supporting a more cost-effective certification program, and consider a testing program effectively used in multiple states for comparability to Oklahoma.
7. **Teacher Recruitment Program** – Oklahoma loses many educators to Texas, which has a robust teacher recruitment program. *Recommendation:* Adopt and fund a teacher recruitment program, with matching funds from the business and education community.
8. **Pay and Multiyear Commitment for Student Teachers** – Oklahoma needs to address the equity and opportunity gaps for students in high-minority and high-poverty areas. *Recommendation:* Incentivize soon-to-be graduates of educator preparation programs to teach in high-need schools by allowing them to work under contract as teachers of record (thus collecting a paycheck) in their last semester of educator preparation. Consider additional incentives in pay or loan forgiveness.
9. **Teacher-Leader Program With Extended Contract and Stipend** – Many experienced teachers leave the classroom for higher pay as school administrators. *Recommendation:* Create a pilot program directing the OSDE to work with districts on different teacher-leader models, such as the system used in Iowa.

The full preliminary report of the task force is [available here](#).

The Oklahoma State Board of Education passed a resolution this week supporting the recommendations. Next, we look forward to working with the legislature in the coming months to take action on the task force's recommendations.

