

# 10 states mull cross-border rules to tackle teacher shortage

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In this Tuesday, Aug. 25, 2020 file photo, an American flag hangs in a classroom as students work on laptops in Newlon Elementary School, which is one of 55 Discovery Link sites set up by Denver Public Schools where students are participating in remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Denver. Colorado lawmakers are considering joining eight other states in an agreement that would eliminate many of the requirements for teachers to get licensed when they move within the member states. Credit: AP Photo/David Zalubowski, File

Every Colorado school district, like many across the country, began 2023 understaffed. That's caused classes to be crammed together, school bus routes to shrink, Spanish language courses to get cut from curriculums, and field trips to be nixed.

This has prompted lawmakers in Colorado and other [states](#) to suggest legislation that would get rid of relicensing requirements for [teachers](#) when they move across state lines—an oftentimes cumbersome and costly process of waiting periods, licensing fees, and expensive exams.

The idea for an Interstate Teacher Mobility Compact was first proposed by the U.S. Department of Defense and is designed, in part, to support military spouses. It would effectively allow teaching licenses to be viable across members of the compact, cutting through the current 50-state patchwork of disparate requirements.

Colorado's House education committee voted nine to two on Wednesday to send the legislation forward in a hearing.

Nine other statehouses are considering joining the compact, including Hawaii, Washington, Kansas, Georgia and Mississippi. For the compact to take effect, 10 states must approve it.

The [national teacher shortage](#), exacerbated by deep losses during the pandemic, has left states scrambling to hire and retain educators. It's pushed school districts across the South to accept candidates without teaching certificates or formal training to staunch the losses.

"The idea of this bill is that it removes a barrier for moving into the state," said Colorado Democratic Rep. Meghan Lukens, one of the bill's sponsors. "By participating in this compact we will allow the seamless

transfer of teachers to our state while maintaining the integrity of our [teacher](#) licensing."

Some worry the change won't make significant difference as long as teachers are underpaid in a state with sky-high housing costs.

In 2020, Colorado paid teachers an estimated average of just over \$60,000 annually, below the national average of about \$65,000, according the National Center for Education Statistics, even though it's one of the most expensive states to live in. On those salaries, only about 20% of available homes in Colorado are affordable to teachers, according to a study by the Keystone Policy Center.

"I think this is another example of a solution that isn't meeting the problem," said Philip Qualman, superintendent at Eagle County School District, which includes the ski town of Vail west of Denver.



Teacher Jessica Flores directs students as they work on laptops in a classroom in Newlon Elementary School on, Aug. 25, 2020, in Denver, Colo., which is one of 55 Discovery Link sites set up by Denver Public Schools where students are participating in remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Colorado lawmakers are considering joining eight other states in an agreement that would eliminate many of the requirements for teachers to get licensed when they move within the member states. Credit: AP Photo/David Zalubowski, File

Qualman said the district is struggling with about 90 vacant positions—the most they've ever had—including custodians, teachers and bus drivers. Applicants who receive a job offer often end up turning it down when they can't find housing within their budget, he said.

"I think it's great to reduce the barriers to licensure for those who want

to come here. But in reality, who's going to want to come here when our compensation is so horrible?" Qualman said.

Adam Diersing, a policy analyst for the Council of State Governments which is working with the Department of Defense in developing and spreading the compact, said "in past compacts we have not seen evidence that accessibility of a license is an impetus for somebody to move to a new state."

Still, Diersing added that teachers move for a plethora of reasons, including caring for aging relatives or joining their military spouse, and that state licensing barriers can push them to leave the field altogether.

"This can be an effective tool to keep folks in the profession when they want to," said Diersing.

Amie Baca-Oehlert, president of the Colorado Education Association, pointed to underfunding as principle cause of teacher shortages. Baca-Oehlert did testify in support of the bill at Wednesday's hearing, arguing that "it certainly opens the door to addressing the bigger issue."

"We need something that attracts them to our state," Baca-Oehlert said in an interview after the hearing, adding that Colorado must also focus on retaining teachers.

Agreeing that underfunding is a key problem, Democratic Rep. Mary Young said "We have to continue to recognize that this is a destination state, we've seen the number of people moving here and we want to make their experiences positive."

Colorado's Democratic Gov. Jared Polis declined to say whether he supports the measure or not.

The legislation is receiving tentative bipartisan support in Colorado, along with other states where the bill is pending. But Diersing, the policy analyst, was unsure whether enough legislatures will sign on to the compact in 2023 to launch it.

He did point to the Nurse Licensing Compact, which passed in 2000 and now has 39 members states as of last year. As for the proposed teacher compact: "It's tough to say."

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