

# **NCDPI Licensure Review**

Final Report

2017

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## Purpose

Over the last few years, educators and their employers in North Carolina have raised concerns about how long it takes to issue a teaching license, citing wait time of 6 months and longer.

To begin addressing this issue, NCDPI contracted with TNTP to review its licensure process and identify opportunities for implementing current licensure law more efficiently and with greater customer satisfaction.

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**The licensure review gathered evidence from educators, districts, charters, and NCDPI staff and reviewed operational data related to the online system and call line.**

## Data Sources

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- Survey responses from 736 educators
- Analysis of application processing
- Review of call log and call line data
- Review of NCDPI licensure website
- Interviews with 14 LEA licensure staff
- Interviews with all Regional Alternative Licensing Centers
- Interviews and survey of NCDPI licensure team
- Interviews with several additional NCDPI and State Board staff
- Interviews with leaders from several other state licensure offices



## Highlights

- There are many positive comments about the online application system from LEAs and educators.
- There is an intentional approach to routing and processing applications.
- There are strong peer supports among the licensure team.
- Many licensure team members have deep expertise.
- Processing times during a slow season mostly met the stated 8-week processing time.



## Challenges

- There is confusion among LEA staff, educators, and licensure staff about how to implement licensure policy.
- Available reference information does not adequately prepare people to apply for and support licensure.
- Technical challenges and weak reporting capabilities of the online application system lead to inefficiency and frustration.
- NCDPI messaging around licensure policy changes quickly, often without enough communication.
- There is limited NCDPI licensure staff development and team building happening.

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## **Finding #1 – People charged with implementing licensure policy are uncertain what current policy is and how to implement it.**

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### **LICENSURE PERCEPTION**

When licensure section staff were asked whether they agree that “I am confident that I know the most current information about licensure policy.”, licensure section staff, only five respondents (33%) chose “Agree” or “Strongly Agree”

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### **EDUCATOR PERCEPTION**

Of educator respondents who did not have smooth interactions with the call line (114) or with e-mailing for assistance (82), 23% of call-line respondents and 20% of e-mail respondents chose “I received contradictory or incorrect information” as a reason.

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### **LEA PERCEPTION**

10 of 13 LEA personnel in interviews mentioned receiving inconsistent or unhelpful responses when calling the call line depending on with whom they spoke.

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## Finding #2 – A major pain point in communications is in availability of reference information.

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When 14 LEA officials were asked, “Do you feel you have all the information you need regarding NC licensure policies and processes within existing resources?” **None were unequivocally positive.**

- **78.6% (11)** mentioned wanting more training on current policy and/or up to date reference materials.
- **64.3% (9)** mentioned problems of being unable to get the information they need about their employees from the Online Licensure System (e.g. attachments, application status, reports).
- **57.1% (8)** mentioned that it is often unclear which application is correct for which situations.

Of the 197 educator respondents who did not have a smooth interaction with the Online Licensure System, **56% chose “It was unclear in the system how to proceed”** as a reason.

In an independent review of the website, six people were given twelve tasks based on frequently asked questions. On average, they were able to **find the answer 40%** of the time.

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**Finding #3 – Data syncing and user log-in issues may be stemming from a system flaw where duplicate entries for the same social security number can be entered.**

**“Most of the problems [with the OLS] I’ve seen is that people register multiple accounts, which is frustrating and we can’t fix it.”**

LEA Human Resources Officer

**“People can create as many accounts as they want. When they create multiple accounts, they can’t log in and [they] get an error message.”**

Licensure Team Member

**“HR systems, payroll, and other feeder systems get the issues when we’re missing license data.”**

NCDPI Staff Member

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## **Finding #4 – A root cause of confusion may be inconsistency of policy development. While NCDPI has a process for updating state board policy, many deviations are made that could lead to poor coordination.**

### Defined Process

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An NCDPI business owner with a substantial tie to the policy in question is identified to coordinate and write updates to policy.



A date is set for review of the policy by the State Board.



The business owner engages the community for feedback and solicits feedback from other NCDPI departments, before Rules Committee review (thus limiting needed changes).



The Rules Committee reviews policy language before advancing to the State Board.



The State Board discusses and then takes action on the proposed policy.

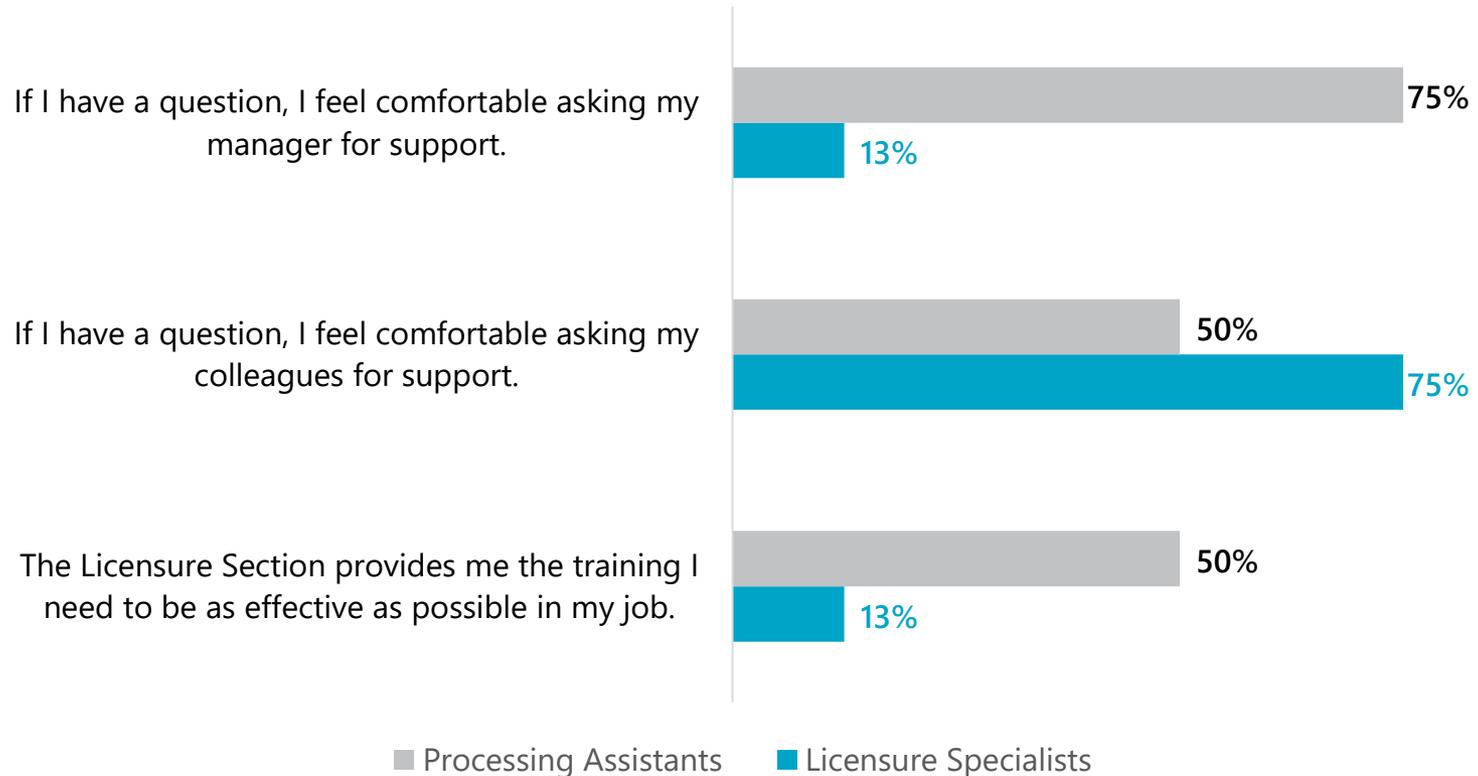
### But in reality...

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- Licensure either works through other business owners OR waits for Rules Committee meetings to introduce changes to licensure policy. No evidence of proactive, planned updates driven by the licensure team identified, despite policy confusion in the field.
- When licensure questions come in from the field, a more informal process is used to resolve them—by Licensure and NCDPIs HR support for LEAs. Answers may contradict what was previously communicated about board policy and be communicated before discussion with NCDPI leadership and affected departments.

## Finding #5 – Another root cause of operational and communications challenges may be insufficient support systems for licensure staff.

### Licensure Section Staff Responding “Agree” or “Strongly Agree”



**In interviews with licensure team members, team members consistently identified peers are their primary support.**

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## We are recommending that NCDPI make improvements in four (4) areas.

### Policy development

Implement a consistent process whereby the licensure section anticipates opportunities to make state board licensure policy clearer and more useful.

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### Communications with the Field

Improve online content and routinely keep customers informed of licensure status and updates.

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### NCDPI Licensure Team Culture & Structure

Build and maintain a supportive and performance-oriented team culture, and ensure enough leadership time is allocated to policy, communications, and training.

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### Technology and Reporting

Resolve glitches with the online system and build reporting functionality for LEAs and the licensure team.

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## Recommendations for Policy Development

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- The licensure team should survey NCDPI departments to determine licensure policy needs through June 30, 2019.
  - NCDPI leadership should set norms on how policy clarifications that do not go to the Rules Committee and State Board should be discussed and normed among key NCDPI departments.
  - NCDPI leadership should hold 2-3 vision-setting sessions to develop a perspective that can provide a foundation for implementation of SB599.
  - NCDPI should identify a business owner within licensure to manage NCDPI efforts to plan for SB599 and set specific goals for progress.
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- The licensure team should create and manage an input and policy development calendar at least through June 30, 2018. This should address departmental needs, general licensure needs, and considerations for Senate Bill 599. More generally, licensure management should make a routine of adjusting and managing a policy agenda.
  - After attempting more structured collaboration, NCDPI should determine whether aligned licensure policy requires LEA HR and Licensure support to fall within the same NCDPI division.

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## Recommendations for Communication with the Field

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- Develop and distribute messaging summarizing findings from the Licensure Review and communicating improvements NCDPI is making.
  - Make sure the same expected processing time of 6-8 weeks is communicated in all licensure communication channels. The team should aspire to achieve 4 week processing times in the fall and winter.
  - Update the automated confirmation email that licensure applicants receive after submitting an application. The email should include expected processing times and have a link to a website that lists documentation that is required for their specific application type. Documentation reminders are most critical for out-of-state, add experience, and add new area applications.
  - Begin providing monthly licensure updates to all individuals responsible for implementing licensure policy, including LEA licensure staff, the NCDPI licensure team, and Institutes of Higher Education. The updates should include standard departmental responses to emerging questions about licensure policy.
  - Allocate two hours daily of a processing assistant's time to answer emails.
  - Provide differentiated training to Specialist and Processing Assistants in how to successfully field customer calls. Trainings should include norming among Processing Assistants of which calls to route to Specialists.
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## Recommendations for Communication with the Field

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- Update website content to ensure users can intuitively find answers to frequent questions, and field test content with educators and LEAs before going live.
  - Establish a regular cadence of automated email communication with educators based on their timeline in licensure.
  - Finalize a plan for how to more effectively manage call volume during the busy summer months—potentially by hiring seasonal customer service specialists for the spring and summer.
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- With feedback from an advisory committee of LEA licensure staff, develop and maintain a separate online portal for LEA HR staff to access more in-depth resources for doing their work effectively. Leverage existing resources developed by the field (e.g. RESA), and explore the possibility of RALC directors helping to keep information current.
  - Organize a series of trainings and updates to the field to ensure understanding of policy as the high-volume season begins.
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## Recommendations for Licensure Team Culture & Structure

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- Review findings and next steps from the licensure review with the licensure team in a way that motivates the team to make necessary changes and encourages them to continue positive work.
  - Set performance goals and expectations related to these recommendations for the Section Chief and Assistant Section Chief and provide support to meet goals.
  - Convene all Specialists every two weeks to discuss examples of challenging applications and customer questions. Ensure these meetings consistently take place but also protect the strong culture of peer support within the licensure section.
  - Determine processing time for applications from May through July and set processing goals through September 2019. The department should, at a minimum, aim for 6 weeks processing times during the busy months and consider 4 week processing times during the fall and winter<sup>1</sup>.
  - Develop success profiles for Specialist and Processing Assistant roles. The success profiles would be used to drive professional learning, goal-setting, and accountability. Profiles should allow for meaningful differentiation of performance by expertise and provide a foundation for the development future career growth opportunities.
  - Create success profiles for the remaining licensure positions. Responsibilities for ongoing responsibilities identified in this report should be embedded into success profiles.
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## Recommendations for Licensure Team Culture & Structure

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- Assess performance baseline for all staff, update goals to build from baseline and align with team goals, and develop training plan through September 15, 2019.
  - Hire for additional leadership capacity to support implementation of recommendations, and hire or reclassify other licensure positions as needed.
  - Update the scope of work for Regional Alternative Licensing Center (RALC) directors to reflect potential changes with Senate Bill 599. Explore formally establishing them as training support for LEA licensure staff in licensure process and including RALC directors in NCDPI staff communications and training.
  - Determine whether reclassification of any licensure team roles is required to align job descriptions with success profiles.
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## Recommendations for Technology and Reporting

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- Make sure duplicate accounts with the same social security number are not permitted on the online system, and ensure all log-in and data flow issues associated with this issue are resolved.
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- Improve reporting in the online system so that LEAs can easily see and export Excel files with the application status for all of their employees and affiliated applicants.
  - Assess whether the current online application platform will meet the data integration needs of other NCDPI data improvements.
  - Assess risks and benefits of shifting to a new platform that has the desired reporting and data integration capabilities, noting that the online system has favorable feedback from the field and shifting the platform may be highly disruptive.
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**Meeting early targets will build momentum and increase chances for improvement. We suggest the following, immediate next steps to determine next steps.**

- Review the recommendations and determine which ones NCDPI will commit to (In-progress)
- Set up meetings and prepare to communicate findings and next steps to licensure leadership and the whole licensure team (Completed)
- Schedule NCDPI leadership conversations for licensure vision and norms for making modifications to State Board policy outside of the Rules Committee (In-progress)
- Identify owners within licensure and set goals to project manage toward objectives for the four areas (In-progress)
- Find additional capacity and support needed for implementation (In-progress)
- Connect with NCDPI Communications to create plan for updating website content and other recommendations related to communication (Future step)

**The fall and winter tends to have lower application volume. Using those months to plan for the high volume anticipated next spring and summer will set NCDPI up to meet its goals.**