

Your Question: You wanted to know if research supports a correlation between a teacher’s advanced degree and his or her success in the classroom.

Our Response:

Research

Most research demonstrates that teachers with masters’ degrees are, on average, no more likely to raise student test scores than those without. Examples include:

- [Do Master’s Degrees Matter? Advanced degrees, career paths, and effectiveness of teachers](#) (CALDER, 2015) The authors in this study analyze the impact of advanced degrees on the effectiveness of middle and high school teachers in North Carolina between 2006 and 2013 and confirm the findings of prior studies: teachers with master’s degrees are no more effective at improving student performance on math and reading tests than those without. However, the authors also uncovered some limited evidence to suggest that middle school teachers with master’s degrees appear to lead to lower student absences than those without. The authors conclude that “salary supplements for teachers cannot be justified on the grounds that teachers with master’s degrees are on average more effective at raising test scores than other teachers”, but argue that “removing the salary supplement for master’s degrees could have undesirable effects on the quality of the teacher labor force unless there are other compensating changes...”.
- [It’s Easier to Pick a Good Teacher Than to Train One: Familiar and new results on the correlates of teacher effectiveness](#) (Economics of Education Review, 2011) The authors in this study analyze the impact of advanced degrees on the effectiveness of elementary and middle school teachers in Florida between 2001 and 2009 and find that “neither holding a college major in education nor acquiring a master's degree is correlated with elementary and middle school teaching effectiveness [in reading and math], regardless of the university at which the degree was earned.”
- [Teacher Qualifications and Student Achievement in Urban Elementary Schools](#) (RAND, 2010) The authors in this study analyze the impact of certain teacher characteristics on the reading and math assessment outcomes of elementary school students in Los Angeles from 2000 to 2004. Among other things, they find that: teacher licensure test scores are unrelated to teacher success in the classroom and that student achievement is unaffected by whether classroom teachers have advanced degrees. The authors suggest that “advanced teacher degrees may have indirect benefits for the teacher workforce. Ongoing training may

Additional Resources

- ✓ [State Teacher Salary Schedules](#) (Education Commission of the States, 2016)
- ✓ [Mitigating Teacher Shortages: Financial Incentives](#) (Education Commission of the States, 2016)
- ✓ [The Sheepskin Effect and Student Achievement](#) (Center for American Progress, 2012)
- ✓ [Smart Money: What teachers make, how long it takes and what it buys them](#) (National Council for Teacher Quality, 2014)

infuse a knowledge base of new teaching techniques that spill over to fellow teachers who are not enrolled in degree programs.”

- [Evaluating the Effect of Teacher Degree Level on Educational Performance](#) (Developments in School Finance, 1996) The authors examine the relationship between student achievement and teacher degree levels and find evidence to suggest that teachers with a master’s degree are no more effective than those without advanced degrees. Further, the authors find that “teachers who are certified in mathematics and have bachelors and master’s degrees in mathematics are associated with higher student mathematics test scores. Likewise, teachers with bachelor’s degrees in science are associated with higher student science test scores.” They conclude that student achievement in technical subjects can be improved not by requiring advanced degrees, but instead by requiring subject expertise.

National Landscape

States commonly support and offer additional incentives for teachers to obtain advanced degrees through: 1) traditional and alternative initial licensing programs, 2) salary supplements, and/or 3) license advancement.

1) Traditional and Alternative Initial Licensing Programs

States and education preparation programs commonly support students who hold a bachelor’s degree (but not in the field of education) and who are seeking to obtain a master’s degree and a teacher’s license, ideally at the same time. Examples include:

- Alaska’s [Master of Arts in Teaching](#)
- Louisiana’s [Master’s Degree Alternative Certification Program](#)
- Mississippi’s [Master of Arts in Teaching](#)

Relatedly, almost every state provides some form of alternative certification, though these programs vary significantly. As described in [this ECS report](#), alternative certification programs allow individuals who have already obtained a bachelor’s degree to bypass the time and expense involved in attaining a teaching degree or completing a graduate program. Not all alternative certification programs reward completers with master’s degrees, but many do.

2) Salary Supplements

- According to the [National Council for Teacher Quality](#), in 2016 fifteen states (**AL, AR, DE, GA, HI, ID, IL, KY, MS, OH, OK, SC, TN, WA, and WV**) required districts to pay higher salaries to teachers with advanced degrees.
- Two states (**LA and NC**) prohibited additional pay for advanced degrees, and three states required performance count more than advanced degrees (**FL, IN and UT**).

3) License Advancement

- According to the [National Council for Teacher Quality](#), in 2016 while no states required teachers to have advanced degrees for initial/probationary licensure, four states (**CT, KY, MD and ND**) required a master’s degree or its equivalent in coursework for professional/non-probationary licensure, and another four states encouraged it as an option (**MA, MI, MO and OR**).
- Fourteen states required an advanced degree to obtain optional advanced professional licenses (**AL, HI, IA, IN, LA, MS, MT, NE, NM, OH, SC, UT, VA, WV**). Some states, such as [Ohio](#), have taken steps in recent years to remove requirements for advanced degrees from the licensure renewal or advancement process.