

Legislative Analysis



ALTERNATIVE TEACHER CERTIFICATION

Mitchell Bean, Director
Phone: (517) 373-8080
<http://www.house.mi.gov/hfa>

House Bill 5596 (Substitute H-3)

Sponsor: Rep. Phillip Pavlov

Committee: Education

First Analysis (12-2-09)

BRIEF SUMMARY: The bill would provide for an alternative process for teacher certification as authorized by the Michigan Department of Education, and allow graduates of alternative route programs to earn an interim teaching certificate.

FISCAL IMPACT: The bill would have an indeterminate fiscal impact for both local school districts and the Department of Education. There may be administrative costs involved in creating and maintaining an alternative teacher certification process.

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

As part of the Obama Administration's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, the U. S. Department of Education has announced a \$4.35 billion stimulus package that has come to be known as the Race to the Top Fund--a competitive grant program available to select states who demonstrate innovation and reform in their educational improvement programs. See *Background Information*. Each state grant is expected to be about \$400 million.

The U. S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, former Superintendent of the Chicago Public Schools, has outlined four core education reform areas in which states must demonstrate proficiency, in order to be eligible to apply for the funds. States must:

- adopt standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace, and compete in the global economy;
- build data systems that measure students' growth and success, and that inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction;
- recruit, develop, reward, and retain effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most; and
- turn around the state's lowest performing schools.

Customarily, effective teachers enter their profession after completing a four- or five-year teacher preparation program at university--the traditional preparation route for most professionals, such as doctors, nurses, pharmacists, lawyers, and architects. In Michigan, these professional teachers take coursework that prepares them to diagnose each learner's strengths and weaknesses in a learning discipline, and then improve their knowledge and understanding through exemplary teaching, learning, curricular, and assessment practices. At the end of their college coursework, they take the appropriate content area examinations whose outcomes make them eligible for either elementary or secondary

provisional certification. Then the deans of their university schools of education recommend them for provisional certification to the Michigan Department of Education. After teaching successfully for three years, they are eligible for a professional certification from the state department. The professional certificate must be renewed every five years, after fulfilling continuing education requirements.

Some schools of education in Michigan also offer an alternative teacher certification program. For example, Saginaw Valley State University offers a one-year program that places candidates who already have a bachelors degree (and usually work experience, too) into a classroom of an urban school for one academic year while they take coursework in the evenings and on weekends. Wayne State University has designed an alternate certification program to train nearly 300 teaching assistants who worked, uncertified, for many years in the Detroit Public Schools, so that they can become teachers. The University of Michigan offers a one-year Masters degree for new teacher candidates who want to switch careers. Graduates of these kinds of programs are provisionally certified by the State of Michigan upon graduation.

For the past two decades, however, the teacher shortage in poor urban and rural school districts has produced alternative teacher certification programs outside the universities. Two highly regarded programs are The New Teacher Project and Teach for America. See *Background Information*. Since 1990 thousands of university graduates who do not complete teacher training coursework have entered the teaching profession through Teach for America. That program offers college graduates from top universities who have high grade-point averages and plenty of motivation a two-year teaching stint at high poverty schools, after completing an intensive five-week summer internship. The TFA assigns the teachers to work in lower tier schools where student progress lags behind the norm, in a nationwide effort to close the achievement gap between rich and poor students many of whom are Black or Hispanic.

Legislation has been introduced to allow the Michigan Superintendent of Public Instruction to offer interim certification to teachers who graduate from select alternative teacher certification programs, outside of those now offered in the state's public universities.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

House Bill 5596 (H-3) would amend the Revised School Code to provide for an alternative process for teacher certification as authorized by the Michigan Department of Education.

The bill requires the Superintendent of Public Instruction to establish a process for a person to earn an interim teaching certificate. That interim teaching certificate would qualify a person both to teach in the public schools and to earn a permanent teaching certificate. The alternative certification process would have to meet all of the requirements for an alternate route to certification under the federal No Child Left Behind

Act of 2001. Further, the process would not allow for an interim teaching certificate in special education.

Under the alternative certification process specified in the bill, the state school superintendent could grant an interim teaching certificate to a person who met all of the following criteria:

- Was a participant in an alternative teaching program approved by the state superintendent. Such approval would be earned when the program demonstrated that it:
 - provided an intensive training program in teaching that was determined by the state superintendent to constitute at least 12 college credits hours and that included training in at least all of the following subject areas: child development or child psychology; family and community relationships; diverse learners; instructional strategies; and a form of field-based experience in the classroom;
 - had a proven record of producing successful teachers in one or more other states, or be modeled after such a program; and
 - only accepted individuals with bachelor's degrees from accredited colleges and universities and with grade point averages of at least 3.0 on a 4.0 scale (or the equivalent on another scale).
- Holds a bachelor's, master's, doctorate, or professional degree from a regionally accredited college or university with a grade point average of at least 3.0 on a 4.0 scale (or the equivalent).
- Passes the applicable examinations, including for secondary teaching both the basic skills examination and the appropriate subject area examination (or an equivalent examination); and including for elementary teachers, the basic skills examination and the elementary certification examination, as well as the appropriate subject area examination (or an equivalent examination).

The bill specifies that a person who had an interim teaching certificate under this section of the law could be employed to teach in a public school in the same manner as a person holding a Michigan teaching certificate, if all of the following requirements were met:

- The school district or charter school where the teacher taught provided intensive observation and coaching in a manner and to the extent prescribed by the state superintendent.
- The teacher was making satisfactory progress toward meeting the requirements for being awarded a Michigan teaching certificate.

Under the bill, the state school superintendent would be required to develop standards for granting a Michigan teaching certificate after a teacher had demonstrated satisfactory

teaching performance for two years under an interim teaching certificate, and had met the requirements established by the state superintendent for a Michigan teaching certificate.

Finally, the state school superintendent would be required to promulgate the rules necessary to implement the alternative certification program.

As used in this section, "basic skills examination," "elementary certification examination," and "subject area examination," mean those terms as defined in Section 1531 of the Revised School Code.

MCL 380.1531i

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

For more information about the Race to the Top Competitive Grant Program, see <http://www.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/executive-summary.pdf>

For more information about Teach for American, see <http://www.teachforamerica.org/corps/traning>

For more information about The New Teacher Project, see <http://www.tntp.org>

ARGUMENTS:

For:

The proponents of this bill note that select programs that offer alternate routes to teacher certification, such as The New Teacher Project and Teach for America, have demonstrated a high level of success in lower tier schools located in rural and urban America. Their teachers--graduates of top quality colleges and having high grade-point averages--are highly motivated and able to lift the test scores of low achievers. Their mission--to narrow the achievement gap between poor and wealthy students in our nation--should be supported, and the members of their programs should be welcome in Michigan's classrooms.

This bill would allow graduates of these and similar high quality programs to earn interim teacher certification--a new certification category--enabling them to teach in Michigan for two years. Thereafter, the alternate route teachers would have to comply with all of the testing and continuing education protocols that other teachers must successfully complete in order to earn the provisional teaching certificate (following two years of teaching) and the professional teaching certificate (following an additional three years of teaching).

Against:

Generally, opponents of this bill offer three arguments. First, they argue that the alternate route interim certification allows adults who have no teaching experience--neither relevant coursework nor classroom practice--to teach in classrooms throughout Michigan.

This exception to the current certification program is far too broad, and should instead be targeted only to high quality programs with a focus on lower tier schools.

Second, opponents note that Michigan already has alternate certifications programs located in university schools of education. For example, Saginaw Valley State University offers a one-year program that places teaching candidates already having a bachelors degree (and usually significant non-teaching work experience, too) into a classroom of an urban school for one academic year, while they take coursework in the evenings and on weekends. Wayne State University has designed an alternate certification program to train nearly 300 teaching assistants who worked, uncertified, for many years in the Detroit Public Schools, so that they can become teachers. Further, the University of Michigan offers a one-year Masters degree for new teacher candidates who want to switch careers. Graduates of these kinds of programs are provisionally certified by the State of Michigan upon graduation.

Third, opponents note that unlike other states or regions in America, Michigan has a surplus of teachers, not a shortage. Indeed, the teacher preparation programs in Michigan are highly regarded, and the novice teachers they graduate each year are heavily recruited by school districts in other states.

Response:

Although Michigan does not have a teacher shortage, there is a recruitment and retention problem in some of the state's urban and remote rural school districts. There, teacher turnover is high, out-of-field teaching is common, and high-quality teaching can be rare. If interim certification can attract highly motivated young teachers to these areas of the state, then it is a policy that deserves strong support in the education community.

POSITIONS:

The Governor's Office supports the bill. (12-2-09)

The Michigan Department of Education supports the bill. (12-2-09)

The Michigan Association of Public School Academies supports the bill. (12-1-09)

The Michigan Schools of Education Deans' Council offered comments on the bill. (12-1-09)

Legislative Analyst: J. Hunault
Fiscal Analyst: Mary Ann Cleary
Bethany Wicksall

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