

News Release

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Legislative action slides teacher licensing standards toward the bottom

MADISON — Major changes to teacher licensing voted into the 2015-17 state budget, without a hearing, puts Wisconsin on a path toward the bottom, compared to the nation, for standards required of those who teach at the middle and high school level.

Adopted as a K-12 omnibus motion by the Joint Committee on Finance (JFC), the education package deregulates licensing standards for middle and high school teachers across the state. The legislation being rolled into the biennial budget would require the Department of Public Instruction to license anyone with a bachelor's degree in any subject to teach English, social studies, mathematics, and science. The only requirement is that a public school or school district or a private choice school determines that the individual is proficient and has relevant experience in each subject they teach. Traditional licensure requires educators in middle and high school to have a bachelor's degree and a major or minor in the subject they teach, plus completion of intensive training on skills required to be a teacher, and successful passage of skills and subject content assessments.

Additionally, the JFC motion would require the DPI to issue a teaching permit for individuals who have not earned a bachelor's degree, or potentially a high school diploma, to teach in any subject area, excluding the core subjects of mathematics, English, science, and social studies. The only requirement would be that the public school or district or private voucher school determines that the individual is proficient and has relevant experience in the subject they intend to teach. For both provisions in the JFC motion, the DPI would not be able to impose any additional requirements. This may preclude the fingerprinting and background checks required of all other licensed school staff. The standard also is lower than that currently required for teachers in choice and charter schools, who must have at least a bachelor's degree.

“We are sliding toward the bottom in standards for those who teach our students,” said State Superintendent Tony Evers. “It doesn't make sense. We have spent years developing licensing standards to improve the quality of the teacher in the classroom, which is the most important school-based factor in improving student achievement. Now we're throwing out those standards.”

(more)

Currently, all 50 states require a beginning teacher to have a bachelor’s degree for traditional licensure, with a narrow exception for career and technical education teachers (Georgia). The states have differing standards for alternative routes to licensure, generally requiring major content coursework or a test in lieu of coursework for individuals to be eligible for an alternate route to earn a teaching license.

“Wisconsin has several routes for career changers, who want to teach our elementary and secondary school students, to earn a teaching license through alternative programs,” Evers noted. “Emergency permits allow them to work under supervision while completing educator preparation program requirements. Each alternative route program ensures that candidates are supported and are ready to do the job independently when they complete alternative licensing requirements.”

Under provisions of the omnibus motion, the leaders of 424 public school districts, 23 independent public charter schools (2R charters), and potentially hundreds of private choice schools would determine who is qualified to teach in their schools. Current provisions of the JFC motion would restrict these licenses to teaching at the district or school that recommended the individual for licensure.

“Learning about how children develop, managing a classroom and diffusing conflict among students, working with parents, and developing engaging lessons and assessments that inform instruction — these are the skills our aspiring educators learn in their training programs,” Evers said. “Teaching is much more than being smart in a subject area.

“This motion presents a race to the bottom,” Evers said. “It completely disregards the value of the skills young men and women develop in our educator training programs and the life-changing experiences they gain through classroom observation and student teaching. This JFC action is taking Wisconsin in the wrong direction. You don’t close gaps and improve quality by lowering standards.”

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NOTES: A “Pathways to Licensure” presentation that describes the various routes to earn an educator license in Wisconsin is available on the Department of Public Instruction website at <http://pb.dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/pb/ppt/Preparation%20Pathways%20to%20Licensure%202%2019%202015.pptx>. This news release is available electronically at http://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/news-release/dpinr2015_58.pdf.