

Findings and Recommendations
Key Points

Teacher Certification Program Implementation

Approved December 11, 2008

Legislative Program Review
& Investigations Committee

Key Points

TEACHER CERTIFICATION PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION (PHASE II)

Background

- Employed public school teachers (and other educators) in Connecticut must hold a valid certificate issued by the State Department of Education's certification unit.
- Certification is required as a way to ensure teachers meet a set of minimum standards.
- About 43,000 full-time equivalent teachers are certified and teaching in the state.

Section I: Certification Unit Operations

- The unit's application processing is mostly effective and efficient, but could be improved by a few changes. Educators and school districts generally are satisfied with the processing timeliness.
- SDE's new web-accessible certification system currently being implemented should make the application process quicker and easier for educators and the department if it becomes available to the public in early 2009 as planned. Full implementation is subject to receiving adequate funding.
- There are no checks of whether certification applications were properly evaluated, including audits of veteran teachers' completion of the continuing education requirement.
- SDE conducts only prospective oversight of non-district continuing education providers and none at all of district providers, although both types of providers are supposed to collect and retain information that would make oversight possible.
- The certification unit has conducted some outreach to prospective and new educators, as well as to districts.
- The levels of certificate materials handled and staff who work on issuing certification have remained about the same over the past three fiscal years.
- There is little oversight of the certification unit output and staff at either the unit or division levels.

Committee Recommendations

- 1. The State Department of Education should consider providing the resources necessary to give the certification unit manager the ability to monitor certification analysts' workloads using the new certification system.**

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2. **The State Department of Education’s certification unit management should periodically review application materials and the certification decisions made by analysts, to ensure applications are being properly processed.**
3. **The State Department of Education should change its transcript review policies by reviewing the coursework of 25 percent of graduates (with at least one review of a candidate from each endorsement area) for Connecticut educator preparation programs that will be undergoing state accreditation review or are on accreditation probation, and expanding the review to include all graduates if any problems are found. At the same time, the current policy of reviewing the coursework of about 10 percent of all Connecticut educator preparation programs’ graduates should remain unchanged.**
4. **C.G.S. Sec. 10-145b(m) shall be amended to require local and regional boards of education to report to the Commissioner of Education the name of any certified employee dismissed for misconduct.**
5. **The State Department of Education should use the new certification system’s CEU-related abilities to implement oversight of CEU audits by tracking the quantity of the audits and conducting occasional checks of the audit quality.**
6. **The State Department of Education should periodically remind districts that Connecticut law requires professional development offerings be developed with the input of teachers.**
7. **The State Department of Education should more effectively oversee certification at both the unit and division levels. This includes developing performance measures and objectives of key functions within the unit and monitoring the unit’s performance based on those measures and objectives.**

Section II: Customer Service

- The certification unit provides service to educators and school districts through mainly telephone service, websites, and e-mail service.
- 90 percent of school districts and 80 percent of educators are satisfied with the unit’s overall level of customer service, according to the results of two committee staff surveys; the certification websites should be made more navigable for customers.
- The certification unit has not recently sought feedback from educators or school districts on how customer service could be improved and has no formal process to gather such feedback.

Committee Recommendation

8. **The State Department of Education’s certification unit, as part of its management oversight process, should periodically elicit feedback from its customers to determine satisfaction with: 1) the unit’s timeliness in responding to calls and e-mail, and in processing certification applications; and 2) the overall thoroughness and completeness of the information provided to educators, districts, and the general public. The techniques used to receive such feedback should be determined by the certification unit.**

Section III: Compliance

- The certification unit works with districts toward ensuring all educators (teachers, administrators, and student services specialists) are appropriately certified for their positions.
- The total number of educators found out of compliance at the end of the 2006, 2007, and 2008 school years is minimal in relation to the total number of educators certified in the state during those years.
- The potential number of students taught daily by teachers who are not appropriately certified in Connecticut and thus deemed not qualified under the state’s certification standards, could be several thousand.
- SDE’s current compliance monitoring process does not independently verify the information submitted by districts through any type of on-site monitoring process; thus the state may not have a comprehensive view of how well school districts and educators across the state are complying with the state’s teacher certification requirements.
- The State Board of Education does not take a proactive approach in requiring districts to comply with the state’s certification requirements for educators.

Committee Recommendations

9. **The State Department of Education should implement an on-site monitoring program as part of its overall system of ensuring school districts and educators fully comply with the state’s certification requirements. Spot audits of a random sample of districts should be made annually, with an audit of each district in Connecticut occurring at least once every five years. More frequent audits of districts with substantial or perennial problems should be made. As part of any on-site compliance audit, the department should offer districts technical assistance and support to improve districts’ overall efforts to comply with state educator certification requirements and the ability of internal systems within districts to produce accurate, timely, and complete compliance information. The department**

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should determine the extent of the new on-site inspection program and seek additional resources commensurate with the new monitoring efforts.

10. The State Board of Education should make compliance with state certification standards among school districts more of a priority at the board level. The board should take a more proactive role approach to ensuring school districts and educators fully comply with the state's certification standards on a regular basis, including publically releasing the names of school districts in non-compliance and applying the board's authority in accordance with C.G.S. Sec. 10-145(b) when necessary.
11. The only formal notification from the state education department to school district superintendents and local/regional boards of education chairpersons should come directly from the commissioner within five business days of when a district does not submit the required compliance information upon first request. If the necessary information regarding the corrective actions taken by a district is not received within 10 business days of receipt of the commissioner's letter, the matter should be forwarded to the State Board of Education for action. The state education board, or a designated committee thereof, should begin the process of enforcing compliance in accordance with the board's statutory authority.
12. The State Department of Education and the Teachers' Retirement Board should determine by February 1, 2009, the most effective process between the two agencies for ensuring teachers are provided proper retirement credit based on their state certification status. SDE should begin sending information to TRB on teachers not properly certified as soon as it becomes available through the annual compliance report generated by the education department.
13. The department of education should ensure its new automated certification system will have the full capacity to allow the department to monitor school districts' compliance with state certification requirements for educators throughout the year instead of the current process which is based on a one-time compliance report generated annually.

Section IV: Certification Requirements

- The state's certification structure and teaching endorsements have largely remained the same since the Education Enhancement Act was passed in 1986.
- The State Department of Education has been shaping and attempting to build support for major changes to the certification structure and endorsement requirements over the past four years.

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- According to the State Department of Education, the integrated certification and special educator proposals, the department's main two changes to teacher certification regulations, are being driven by federal laws, the education community's research, and changes in Connecticut's classrooms. The integrated certification proposal is intended to give new teachers the skills to teach a broad range of students.
- If the integrated certification proposal is effectively implemented, new teachers will be sufficiently equipped to implement the SDE proposed change in how instruction is delivered, that aims to improve student performance.
- In this round of developing certification changes, SDE has reached out to education constituencies and been receptive to conversations when approached by them.
- Researchers agree the literature has formed a consensus that knowledge of both subject matter and how to teach subjects (i.e., pedagogy) – especially practice in teaching – is important in improving student performance, but it is not known exactly which levels of subject and pedagogy knowledge or teaching practice are necessary to have that positive effect.
- SDE recognizes the completion of state-approved teacher preparation programs in states with which Connecticut has an agreement as sufficient in meeting teacher coursework requirements, but does not recognize as adequate the completion of: 1) preparation programs in states not recognized with an agreement; 2) alternate route programs in any state; or 3) preparation programs approved by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), despite NCATE's accreditation standards being Connecticut's state approval standards.
- The purpose of a certification continuing education requirement is to ensure teachers are continually improving their practice and thereby also improving student learning, but there seems to be broad consensus among education constituencies in Connecticut – including many within SDE – that continuing education currently is not effective in some districts.
- The assessment standards-setting process and criteria used by Connecticut are appropriate and uniform across states and tests, but the education department does not consistently monitor whether each basic skills exam (i.e., Praxis I) and content test (i.e., Praxis II) reflects current practice and expectations of beginning teachers.
- SDE is holding discussions with the Massachusetts education department regarding how to facilitate testing reciprocity.

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Committee Recommendations

14. The State Department of Education should continue to involve all pertinent stakeholders as changes in regulations are put forth, allow more discourse for understanding to be reached when there is disagreement over a particular proposal, and adjust its certification proposals when necessary to advance the state's educational goals, including improved student achievement.
15. The State Department of Education should consider whether to expand coursework reciprocity to graduates of NCATE-accredited teacher preparation programs and to graduates of alternate route programs in NASDTEC interstate agreement states.
16. The State Department of Education should consider accepting within its current certification proposals related majors in both teacher shortage subject areas and non-shortage areas, leaving in place the subject knowledge test requirement (Praxis II or foreign language test).
17. The State Department of Education should consider whether an interdisciplinary major should be required for elementary education teachers, rather than giving those teachers a choice between a subject major and an interdisciplinary major.
18. The State Department of Education should consider whether the precise or related major requirement should be changed to a moderate content area coursework requirement, leaving in place the subject knowledge test requirement.
19. The State Department of Education should reconsider requiring the coursework to move to professional certification be at the graduate level. The department also should consider whether 30 credits beyond the bachelor's degree should be required for certification purposes.
20. The State Department of Education should seek and use input from Connecticut's education stakeholders in considering whether the recommendations regarding teacher coursework requirements should be adopted.
21. C.G.S. Sec. 10-145b(l)(1) shall be amended to require each teacher holding the state's highest-level certification shows the teacher has engaged in meaningful professional development over the duration of the highest-level certificate. The teacher must demonstrate, in a format and in accordance with standards and guidelines developed by the State Department of Education, that each professional development effort was: 1) substantial in duration; 2) connected to student learning and teaching in a subject for which the teacher holds or is pursuing an endorsement; 3) involving the teacher applying in the classroom what was learned; and 4) aligned with state teaching standards and the needs of the teacher's district and students.

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The State Department of Education should develop a list of activities that are acceptable forms of professional development. Such activities must first be connected to improving teaching or, secondarily, obtaining a cross-endorsement. At minimum, the list should include the following activities (in no particular order):

- 1) formally mentoring one or more beginning teachers;
 - 2) participating in or leading district or school level committees, initiatives, or seminars on any of the following topics: a) developing and/or teaching a new curriculum; b) assessing students (including development of assessments) and using assessment data to adjust instruction; c) differentiating instruction for diverse learners; and d) obtaining school accreditation;
 - 3) completing coursework to obtain a cross-endorsement;
 - 4) completing a research project that is focused on improving student learning;
 - 5) serving as a teacher-in-residence at the State Department of Education; and
 - 6) working on obtaining certification by the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards.
22. The State Department of Education, as part of its forthcoming initiative to produce new teacher evaluation standards, should require a teacher's professional development efforts be discussed and considered as part of the district's teacher evaluation process.
23. Prior to adoption of the new professional development requirements, the State Department of Education – as part of its current stakeholders committee process – should begin discussing the framework of a proper oversight and approval mechanism for the new professional development system for teachers. The department should use the framework to fully develop its administrative structure for a professional development oversight and approval process.
24. The State Department of Education should make a stronger effort to draw assessment panelists from the broader education community. The department should consider asking all principals and department chairs to: 1) apply to be panelists; and 2) suggest teachers and colleagues as panel nominees.
25. The State Department of Education should convene small panels of educators every five years to re-evaluate whether the basic skills and content area assessments and assessment standards remain appropriate.

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- 26. The State Department of Education should continue its efforts in developing testing reciprocity with Massachusetts and New York and periodically report on its progress to the State Board of Education.**