

Alaska State Legislature

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Senator Donald C. Olson

Senate Bill 136

Relating to teacher certificates and teacher preparation programs; and providing for an effective date.

SB 136 amends Alaska Statute 14.20.020 to add a new subsection (m) requiring the State Board of Education and Early Development to establish standards for approving alternative teacher preparation programs to operate in Alaska.

The standards will set forth criteria for approving alternative teacher preparation programs that are comparable to those offered by a higher education institution. The standards will ensure that to be approved, the program must be comparable to nationally recognized pedagogy standards, such as the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) pedagogy standards or those of another organization approved by the Commissioner of Education. Furthermore, the standards for approving an alternative teacher preparation program will also ensure a program has a proven track record over a period of at least five years in multiple states.

Alaska's teacher shortage crisis is well documented and has been exacerbated in recent years. As of April 21, 2023, the Alaska Teacher Placement website listed 315 job openings for elementary, middle, and high school teachers. The number of openings at the beginning of the school year was significantly higher, causing school districts to explore options such as long-term substitutes, recruiting teachers from foreign countries, and issuing emergency certificates. This legislation aims to mitigate the teacher shortage by adding another option for individuals with bachelor's degrees and professional experience to become certified teachers after showing proficiency in pedagogy and academic subject matter.

Commonly known as alternative teacher certification programs, Alaska has identified the need for these programs to be a part of addressing the State's teacher recruitment and retention crisis. In April 2021, the Governor's Teacher Retention and Recruitment Working Group issued its Action Plan. The Plan's fourth Essential Area, Enhancing Recruitment Efforts and Opportunities, included a series of recommendations for bringing new teachers into the classroom. Among those recommendations was the following found on page 8 of the report:

5. Consider models of Alternative Certification Pathways and determine which ones to adopt.
 - Support non-traditional applicants gaining pedagogical knowledge using external options such as this online program currently used by 15 states (<https://www.americanboard.org/>).
 - Develop a pathway for Alternative Certification for those with a BS or BA who want to teach.
 - Create a non-traditional route outside the university system.
 - Ensure this certification is competency based, with an evaluation method to test.
 - Allow forgiveness of some required courses.
 - Ensure pathway has an appropriate level of rigor.

This legislation implements that recommendation.