

## **Discussion Notes: Educator Certification Breakout Session**

*Stakeholder Session #1 | April 28, 2016*

### **I. Overview**

David Hendrie, Senior Program Associate for Education Workforce at the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), led morning and afternoon breakout sessions with participants focused on the potential impacts and opportunities of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) on educator certification in Pennsylvania. CCSSO provided an overview of the following elements of ESSA:

- Title II provisions allowing for state-led efforts to attract and prepare a high-quality education workforce;
- Elimination of the “highly qualified teacher” (HQT) requirement of No Child Left Behind; and
- Maintenance of the federal requirement to ensure equitable access to effective educators.

CCSSO also provided some guiding questions on ESSA’s impact on educator certification in Pennsylvania:

- Should current licensing/certification requirements in Pennsylvania be revisited?
- What certification barriers exist that prevent effective educators from entering the profession?
- What impact could ESSA’s flexibility have on addressing Pennsylvania’s teacher shortage?
- How can Pennsylvania ensure equitable access to effective educators for all students?

### **2. Discussion Points**

The facilitator encouraged participants to consider priority areas related to educator certification that work group members should contemplate as they begin their work in June. In particular, breakout session participants focused on the following key questions:

#### **What are some of the drawbacks/challenges in the current educator certification system?**

- Four years of training in traditional teacher preparation programs at postsecondary institutions may not be enough to adequately prepare
- Misalignment between higher education program requirements and K-12 district needs/practices
- Silos
- Rigid rules/requirements
- Lack of quantifiable data to share with colleges and new teachers that show jobs are available
- Faulty expectations that new teachers are “day one ready”
- Gaps between theory and real life practice
- Current assessment requirements create a barrier to attracting diverse students
- In-depth certifications (Certification State/Global Reciprocity “no-no”)
- Unclear legislation in PA Code
- Alternate Certification should not dilute education for student teachers and/or guest teachers

- Restrictive Dual Certification issues for Special Education and reciprocity sometimes plays against schools, especially secondary schools, and has led to a demonstrable shortage without improving quality
- Content education vs. special education certifications, and misalignment between current certifications and special education
- Math & Science shortages (Global Recruitment)
- Cuts in programs and lack of positions in certain areas cause students to avoid that area of certification, leading to teachers not certified in that content area providing instruction
- Alternate options for retired educators which don't impact PSERS
- Add on certifications don't align with training
- Restrictive Middle School certification
- Too little depth over breadth in classroom experience
- PreK-4, 5-8 is limiting teacher candidate pool
- Need certification flexibility in Elementary to place teachers to match student needs

### **What are some possible strategies for overcoming those challenges?**

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- Leverage federal funding (Title II) available through ESSA to help make inroads on cross-sector collaboration, alternative pathways, etc.
- Accessibility of student teacher (Praxis) exams
- Communication between K-12 and higher education
- Develop a deeper understanding of “day one ready,” including balancing practical/field learning with theory/classroom learning
- Improve diversity and quality of teacher workforce by incentivizing pipeline of effective teachers placed in high-need areas
- Build data systems and use data at state level on openings and needs to identify gaps and opportunities (use IUs as a facilitator)
- Standard of quality education
- Eliminate 4-8 certification
- Develop 5-6 add-on to the preK-4 certification
- Eliminate dual certification for special education
- Reciprocity – ease of mobility
- Prep Programs customized by the diversity of setting
- Pension changes to bring back retired teachers on a part-time basis
- Paid internships for student teachers
- Teacher loan payback
- Increase the substitute rates to incentivize teachers to work in their field
- Publicize post-BA strategies (career switchers)

### **What does a successful state approach for educator certification in Pennsylvania look like given the opportunities created by ESSA?**

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- Meeting needs of school districts (example: considering pre-K-16+)
- Collaboration (schools need to be committed to the residency)
- Move from narrow, in-depth certifications to endorsements and reciprocity
- Lower threshold for Basic Skills Assessment to attract the best, most diverse students into education prep programs
- Qualitative assessments to ensure quality
- Improved flexibility for programs, including alternative choices
- Earlier outreach

- Ensure students have extended background in real life experiences (vs. just theory)
- Adjust expectations to recognize that new teachers are novice rather than “day one ready”
- Breadth delivered with adequate depth in prep programs, including increasing grade levels in elementary while maintaining depth
- Full staffing
- Provide data on shortages now and future to inform policy and recruitment
- Improve flexibility to meet regional needs
- Emphasis on collaboration with Special Education
- Assessment (test) reflects key criteria (key content identified similar to basic education standards to help students prepare for assessments)
- Highly qualified teachers who aren’t limited by certification
- Reduce certifications to K-6, 7-12 content
- Certificate bands (grade levels) align to needs
- Eliminate Secondary Dual Certification requirements

### **What additional information is required?**

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- [Governor’s Commission on Training America’s Teachers report](#) prepared during the Rendell Administration and published in 2006 echoes a lot of the concerns voiced in group discussions – worth revisiting recommendations.
- More detailed background information regarding Pennsylvania’s existing certification requirements may be helpful.
  - PA Department of Education, [Certification Preparation – Program Framework Guidelines and Rubrics](#)

### **3. Key Takeaways & Next Steps**

A few central themes emerged from the educator certification breakout session discussions, including:

- Need for improved collaboration between K-12 and postsecondary education institutions to ensure that educator preparation program standards and expectations are aligned with the needs and realities of school districts;
- Opportunity to capitalize on new flexibilities – and funding – through ESSA to support the development or expansion of innovative practices and programs related to educator certification;
- Accessibility, equity, and quality as important goals of Pennsylvania’s educator certification system and policies; and
- Importance of flexibility, reciprocity, and mobility coupled with need for preparation programs and training that is tailored to the needs of specific regions and/or districts.

Breakout session participants identified those takeaways and the preceding themes as areas where members of the Educator Certification Work Group should begin their initial discussions in June.