

Senate Education Committee
SB 407 – Alternative Licensure
WRITTEN ONLY - Proponent Testimony
David Dorsey, Senior Education Fellow
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Dear Chairwoman Baumgardner and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to provide written-only proponent testimony on HB 2521. My name is David Dorsey and I am a Senior Education Fellow with Kansas Policy Institute

Philosophically, I wholeheartedly support the concept of alternative certification for aspiring teachers. That’s exactly the path I took when I was certified as a public-school teacher in Arizona in the 1990s. I had a very successful teaching career for two decades without having an education degree including 17 years in Kansas public school classrooms.

I never understood, quite frankly, why a full 4-year degree with an education major is an essential prerequisite in order to teach. A study from the Mackinac Institute for Public Policy questioned whether state-based teacher certification is even necessary. They concluded that “certification deters rather than ensures that the most qualified people are teaching in our classrooms.”¹ In my humble opinion, there are four basic skills needed to become a successful K-12 teacher (not necessarily in order of importance):

- Classroom management – this is the most critical one for prospective elementary teachers.
- Pedagogy – understanding how kids learn and how to teach. This is a close second to classroom management for elementary teachers.
- Content knowledge – This almost goes without saying for middle and high school teachers, but is surprisingly an issue in elementary school, particularly in math.
- On-site preparation (student teaching) - the basic understanding of how public schools actually work, in and out of the classroom. Therefore, all aspiring teachers should be required to spend a full school year in a public school to get the education that there is more to teaching than simply in the classroom.

The proposed legislation is a step in the right direction because it does provide an opportunity to expand the teacher base consistent the State Board of Education’s goal to increase the number of teachers in the state. It would do so without requiring a prospective teacher to undergo years of superfluous university training.

I do have one thought on the language of the bill in the provision for alternative licensure programs to have a five-state, ten-year track record. On one hand the idea behind this language aims to ensure rigor. On the other hand, the aim should be to ensure a pathway for alternative licensure that doesn’t exclude new entrants. We encourage the committee to consider this balance.

I would also make a general point about the importance of classroom experience and mentorship. I was on both sides of mentorship – both mentored and as a mentor – and can testify that despite mentoring being a conceptually sound approach, mentoring should not be considered a substitute for an adequate preparation prior to one beginning a teaching career.

I commend the Legislature for pursuing the expansion of alternative teacher certification.

¹ <https://www.mackinac.org/V1999-07>