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# ISSUE BRIEF

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## EDUCATOR LICENSING

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In Colorado, the majority of professional educators in public K-12 schools receive a license from the Colorado Department of Education (CDE). While current law does not require a professional license to work in some public charter or private schools, a professional license is required for most teaching and administrative jobs in public schools. This issue brief examines the different types of professional educator licenses, and the role of the Office of Educator Licensing within the CDE.

### Types of Licenses in Colorado

**Educators.** In Colorado, most educators obtain an initial license, followed by a professional license. In addition, every license includes at least one endorsement area that identifies the subject matter in which the individual is authorized to teach.

Initial educator licenses are valid for three years and issued to applicants who have a bachelor's degree and have completed an approved teacher preparation program at an institution of higher education. Initial licenses are also issued for special services, such as school counselor, school nurse, or a school physical therapist.

Professional licenses are valid for five years and issued to applicants who hold an initial license and have successfully completed a State Board of Education (SBE) approved induction program in the school district. An induction program is provided by school districts and Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), and may include

supervision by mentor teachers and ongoing professional development and training. An out-of-state applicant may be exempt from the induction program requirement if he or she has three or more years of continuous and successful experience as a teacher.

Once an applicant has obtained a professional license and holds certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, he or she is eligible for a master teacher certificate and may be eligible for a stipend awarded by the CDE if he or she is employed in a low-performing, high-needs school.

Another license available to Colorado educators is an alternative license. An alternative license is valid for up to two years and allows applicants who otherwise meet requirements but have not completed an approved preparation program to work in an alternative teacher licensure program administered by a designated agency, which may be a school district, BOCES, a higher education institution, a nonprofit organization, an accredited nonpublic school, or a combination thereof. During the alternative program, the applicant is employed full-time while receiving instruction, mentoring, and supervision from the school district. Upon completion of the program, the applicant is eligible to apply for an initial license.

**Principals and administrators.** Initial licenses are also issued for administrative positions, such as school principal, superintendent, or director of special education. To be eligible for an initial principal license, an individual must have a bachelor's degree

and complete a principal preparation program that is approved by the CDE and the Department of Higher Education. He or she must also complete at least three years of licensed experience working with students in an elementary or secondary school in the state.

To be eligible for a superintendent license, an individual must have a degree from an approved graduate program for school administration. There is no experience in a school setting required for a superintendent.

To be eligible to be a director of special education, an applicant must hold a master's degree in education, special education, or a related field of special services and complete an approved program for the preparation of special education directors. A minimum of two years' experience working with students with disabilities is required.

**License renewal.** An initial teacher license may be renewed if the applicant has not been able to complete an approved induction program during the three years that the license is valid. A Colorado professional license may be renewed every five years, providing the applicant has completed six semester hours of college/university credit or 90 clock hours of professional development.

### **Other Applicant Requirements**

Once an applicant has successfully received an academic degree appropriate for the license, he or she must complete an educator preparation program, a background check, and a content test.

**Educator preparation programs.** The SBE and the Colorado Commission on Higher Education (CCHE) collaboratively review and approve educator preparation programs at institutions of higher education. The CDE conducts content reviews of educator preparation programs.

**Background check.** All applicants are required to submit a complete set of fingerprints to the Colorado

Bureau of Investigation and undergo a comprehensive criminal history background check.

**Content test.** All applicants are required to take and pass a content assessment. This test is required for all initial educator license applicants, including candidates for teaching, special services, principal, and administrator licenses.

### **Role of the Educator Licensing Unit within CDE**

The Educator Licensing Unit within the CDE is responsible for issuing educator licenses, approving teacher preparation programs, and handling disciplinary actions against licensees. The department processes approximately 30,000 applications annually. There are currently 50,000 active educator licenses in the state.

**License issuance.** The CDE charges a fee of \$80 for all educator license applications except the one-year substitute authorization. Applications submitted to the CDE will be processed within two to four weeks. Incomplete applications expire automatically after 90 days of inactivity, requiring applicants to reapply. Since 2010, CDE has used an online license application system. The online application system has decreased application processing time significantly.

**Revocation of licenses.** A license can be revoked by the CDE as a result of certain actions by the licensee, including crimes involving sex or drugs, felony child abuse, a felony offense in another state, violence with a weapon, or if the SBE finds that the licensee is professionally incompetent or guilty of unethical behavior.

According to CDE, approximately 40 licenses are referred annually to the SBE for board action. Approximately 95 percent of those are sent to the board to revoke a license, deny an application for a license, or suspend a license. Once an applicant is notified that his or her license has been referred to the SBE for review, the applicant has a right to appeal a decision of the SBE.