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ALTERNATIVE TEACHER LICENSURE IN COLORADO

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In Colorado, there are two paths to earn a alternative teacher license. A candidate for alternative teacher licensure may participate in either a one-year or a two-year program leading to initial professional licensure in an endorsement area. This issue brief discusses recent legislative changes to the program enacted during the 2009 legislative session.

Background

During the 2009 legislative session, the General Assembly enacted Senate Bill 09-160, which updates existing state law pertaining to alternative teacher programs. Prior to the enactment of this legislation, there were two alternative teacher licensure programs in Colorado: the two-year Teacher in Residence Program and the one-year Alternative Licensing Program. Under Senate Bill 09-160, the programs are renamed the two-year alternative teacher program and the one-year alternative teacher program, respectively. The changes enacted were a result of a recommendation by the Governor's P-20 Council.

Program Standards

The legislation requires both the one-year and two-year alternative teacher programs to meet the Colorado performance-based standards for teachers. The minimum standards established under state law require that a candidate for initial teacher licensure demonstrate teaching competencies, such as the ability to:

- align instructional objectives with adopted student learning standards;
- adjust to individual student needs and enable the student to improve his or her performance;
- integrate technology into instruction;
- engage parents;
- assess and measure student performance; and
- demonstrate a high level of content area knowledge.

The State Board of Education (the board) is responsible for establishing common credit hour standards and minimum coursework standards by rule. State law specifies that elementary teachers may meet the minimum coursework standards by passing the elementary content test, and that secondary teachers may do so by:

- holding a degree in the endorsement area;
- passing a content test in the endorsement area; or
- completing 24 hours of coursework in the endorsement area.

Additionally, the law states that an *alternative licensure program* must have the following elements:

- supervision by mentor teachers;
- performance evaluations; and
- a program minimum of 225 clock hours of planned instruction and activities, which must include training on dropout prevention.

Program Administration

An approved alternative licensure program is administered by a designated agency, which may be a school district, board of cooperative educational services (BOCES), an accepted higher education institution, a nonprofit organization, an accredited nonpublic school, or a combination thereof. To establish a program, a designated agency must submit a description of the program to the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) for approval by the board. The board has 90 days to notify the designated agency whether the program is approved.

Program implementation. The CDE is required to provide technical assistance in implementing an alternative licensure program upon request from a designated agency. A designated agency may also choose to contract with a higher education institution in order to implement its program. A contract for such an agreement must include, at a minimum, the provision of teacher preparation courses and subject matter courses that are in compliance with the teacher preparation program requirements established by the Colorado Commission on Higher Education.

Program evaluation. Not more than every five years, the CDE is required to perform an on-site evaluation of each alternative teacher licensure program. Programs deemed as not meeting the requirements under state law are subject to disapproval by the board. However, a designated agency may redesign the program before the end of the academic year to be in compliance. If the redesigned program is approved by the board, the program will not be terminated.

Application for an Alternative Teacher License

Applicant eligibility. Under state law, the CDE may issue an alternative teacher license to any applicant who:

- holds an earned baccalaureate degree from a fully accredited higher education institution;
- has been recommended by an accepted higher

education institution as holding a baccalaureate degree and has demonstrated having the subject matter knowledge necessary for teaching in the appropriate endorsement areas; and

- agrees to participate in a one- or two-year alternative teacher program provided by a designated agency.

Term of alternative license. Once a person has been issued an alternative teacher license, it is valid for up to two years, except that alternative teachers seeking a special education endorsement may hold an alternative license for three years. Each alternative teacher has a support team, composed of a mentor teacher, the school principal and a representative of an accepted higher education institution, that is responsible for: establishing the alternative teacher program content; determining when the alternative teacher is ready for classroom instruction; ensuring that he or she teaches primarily in his or her endorsement area; evaluating the alternative teacher's progress and effectiveness; and, at the end of the program, recommending the alternative teacher either for initial licensure or for an extension of the alternative licensure for an additional year.

Upon completion of an alternative teacher program, the alternative teacher must obtain an initial teacher license from the CDE in order to be employed by a school district. A professional license may not be issued to an alternative teacher prior to completion of an induction program.

Rule promulgation. The board has not promulgated the rules for the application process for the redesigned one- and two-year alternative teacher programs. According to the department, the rule promulgation process for Senate Bill 09-160 should occur at the beginning of 2010. Until new rules have been promulgated, interested applicants may contact the CDE Educator Licensing Unit for more information on how to apply for an alternative teacher license, by visiting: www.cde.state.co.us and clicking on the "Educator Licensng/Services" link on the home page.