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December 1, 2015

The Honorable Thomas "Mike" Miller
H-107 State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Michael Busch
H-101 State House
100 State Circle
Annapolis, MD 21401

RE: Workgroup Report: Alternative Certification Programs (MSAR #10533)

Dear President Miller and Speaker Busch:

We are pleased to submit the findings of the workgroup assembled to study Alternative Certification programs as mandated by Senate Bill 635-State Board of Education and the Professional Standards and Teacher Education Board - Alternative Certification Programs (MSAR#10533). This bill, enacted during the 2015 session and signed into law, required the State Board of Education (SBOE) and the Professional Standards and Teacher Education Board (PSTEB) to consider and, if appropriate, develop an alternative teacher certification program for areas of the state experiencing a critical teacher shortage by December 1, 2015.

The SBOE and PSTEB each designated two participants to the workgroup, and the State Superintendent of Schools selected Prince George's County Public Schools to serve as the urban school system representative and Washington County Public Schools to serve as the rural district representative. Members included Mr. Guffrie Smith, Jr. (SBOE), Ms. Linda Eberhart (SBOE), Dr. Alyssia James (PSTEB), Mr. Charles Hagan (PSTEB), Ms. Laura Francisco (Washington County), Ms. Lindsey Darr (Washington County), and Mr. Theo Cramer (Prince George's County). Staff from the Maryland State Department of Education included Ms. Penelope Thornton Talley (Chief Performance Officer), Mr. Derek Simonsen (Office of the Maryland Attorney General), Ms. Sarah Spross (Assistant State Superintendent), Ms. Michelle Dunkle (Program Approval and Assessment) and Ms. Alexandra Cambra (Division of Educator Effectiveness).

The workgroup reviewed the current teacher shortage areas as defined by the 2014-2016 Teacher Staffing Report, identified the current routes to teacher certification, and discussed how the current Maryland Approved Alternative Preparation Program (MAAPP) regulations could be used to offer additional flexibility to address a local school system's (LSS's) hiring needs.

Prior to making recommendations, the group discussed the importance of ensuring that the certification requirements do not impede great teachers from achieving certification. It was noted that only 50% of all Maryland teachers have 10 years or more of teaching experience and 40% of Maryland's teachers leave the profession within the first three years. Furthermore, the participants emphasized the need to strike a balance between finding a way to keep quality teachers in the classroom while also assuring that all our teachers meet the necessary requirements for educating our students. They also identified the need to diversify the teacher population as an important goal.

Specific discussion, findings, and recommendations of the workgroup can be found below.

Routes to Certification

Traditional:

Traditional routes include completing a college or university State-approved educator preparation program; holding a valid, out of state professional certificate and submitting verification of 27 months of full-time, satisfactory professional experience; meeting transcript analysis requirements; and by adding an endorsement to an existing certificate.

In 2012 and in response to an identified need, COMAR 13A.12.02.27 Specialized Professional Areas (grades 7-12) was adopted to provide an avenue for individuals with specialized skills, such as a concert violinist, to be able to enter the classroom through a traditional route. This particular regulation recognizes that to meet the diverse needs of our students, LSSs need to have additional ways to recruit and retain highly specialized teachers.

Non-traditional:

Non-traditional routes include completing a Resident Teacher Certification program in a MAAPP or applying for a conditional teaching certificate.

MAAPPs provide LSSs with the opportunity to design a Resident Teacher Program to meet their system's specific needs. The express purpose of the MAAPP is to assist LSSs fill hard-to-staff positions within their schools. MAAPPs depend upon the LSS's projection of hiring need by certification area. For example, if a LSS projects in the early spring that it would need two Math, one Spanish, and two Family and Consumer Science teachers the following fall, the MAAPP would recruit for exactly those teachers, entering candidates into a program approved to meet the COMAR requirements. Teachers who complete the program would be hired at the end of the training and have the opportunity to achieve experience toward tenure.

Conditional certificates provide another non-traditional route for individuals to enter the teaching profession. These certificates are valid for two years and can be renewed once, if the applicant has met specified requirements during the initial two-year time period. Local school systems may only apply for a conditional certificate on behalf of an individual when they are otherwise unable to find a qualified person.

Discussion of Non-Traditional Routes

Maryland Approved Alternative Preparation Programs:

Participants agreed that the current regulations pertaining to MAAPPs afford LSSs the opportunity to develop programs that meet their specific needs. However, members agreed that MSDE should provide increased training and outreach regarding the options available to LSSs so that they may meet their county-specific teacher needs. Furthermore, the members would like MSDE to explore the possibility of designing a state-wide or regional MAAPP that may benefit all LSSs interested in partnering.

Conditional Certificate:

The workgroup further discussed the benefits and drawbacks concerning the conditional certificate. Currently the regulations require an individual to complete 12 credits and pass the PRAXIS CORE within two years in order to maintain a conditional certificate. The amount of coursework required during the term of the first conditional certificate was especially concerning to members of the workgroup because this requirement makes it difficult for first year educators to earn credits while devoting the time necessary to become acclimated to the classroom and to participate in required LSS-level professional development.

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Ideas explored included expanding the conditional to a one time, four year certificate with no prescribed timelines for accruing coursework requirements. Other ideas included reducing the coursework requirements on the first conditional certificate, moving the test requirements to be completed by the end of the second conditional certificate, or expanding the first conditional certificate validity to three years. Ultimately, the group felt that there must be a much broader stakeholder group convened to explore potential changes to the requirements of the conditional certificate.

Recommendations

The recommendations of this workgroup are as follows:

- 1) Increase Awareness and Training to LSSs. Current regulations pertaining to MAAPPs appear to be sufficient; however, MSDE must increase outreach and awareness of the flexibility afforded to LSSs in developing a MAAPP; and
- 2) Examine the Conditional Certificate. Convene a large stakeholder group to include members from the SBOE, PSTEB, Superintendents/designees, principals, and Human Resources staff to explore the requirements for a conditional certificate and their impacts on teacher recruitment and retention.

Finally, while unrelated to the charge, the workgroup emphasized the need for MSDE to review teacher certification test requirements.

MSDE is grateful for the continued interest in maintaining the highest levels of quality for all children in Maryland Public Schools, particularly in our most difficult to staff schools and content areas. Should you have any questions regarding the information contained in any of this material I am sending today, please contact Sarah Spross at 410-767-0385 or at sarah.spross@maryland.gov.

On behalf of the workgroup, thank you for your ongoing efforts on behalf of a strong public education for all of Maryland's children.

Sincerely,



Sarah Spross
Chair, SB 635 Workgroup

C: Jack R. Smith, Ph.D.
Amanda Stakem Conn, Esq.
Sarah Albert