

Recommendations Regarding the Assessment of Candidates for Certification

The State Board of Education's Teacher and School Leader Effectiveness Committee (Committee) undertook a periodic review of the assessment requirements for candidates for educator certification as set forth in 22 Pa. Code § 49.18. The Committee reviewed extensive information pertaining to the current assessments required for certification, including data on first-attempt and best-attempt pass rates over the past five years, pass rate data disaggregated by gender, race and ethnicity, and assessments costs. The Committee also considered how other states measure whether candidates are prepared to enter the classroom, and sought to understand which states mandate certification testing, which states permit alternative modes of assessment, and which states do not mandate testing.

In addition, stakeholders shared their perspectives with the Committee and offered considerations regarding certification assessment requirements through various channels. The Department of Education convened multiple stakeholder engagement sessions to gather feedback from higher education students, classroom teachers, principals, Superintendents, Intermediate Unit Directors, higher education faculty, and higher education deans. Participants in these sessions provided input on the accessibility and cost of certification assessments, test content and format, the role of tests and support for alternatives. The Learning Policy Institute prepared an overview of research and policy considerations pertaining to performance assessments to inform the Committee's deliberations. Other organizations submitted written comments directly to the Committee.

The Committee has considered the wealth of information compiled regarding current assessment requirements, alternative pathways utilized by other states, and the perspectives of stakeholders who are directly affected by certification testing. In addition, the Committee recognizes that recent amendments to the Public School Code enacted in Act 47 of 2025 will necessitate a change in the tests Pennsylvania currently utilizes to measure certain candidates' readiness to enter the classroom.

The Committee issues the following recommendations:

- At present, teacher candidates may pursue Instructional certificates in Early Childhood (grades PreK-4), Elementary/Middle (grades 4-8), Secondary (grades 7-12), and in Specialized Areas (grades PreK-12). In Act 47 of 2025, the General Assembly amended the Public School Code to establish new grades spans for Instructional certificates as follows: Primary (grades PreK-6), Secondary (grades 7-12), and Specialized Areas (grades PreK-12). The amendments to the Public School Code enacted in Act 47 further require candidates enrolled in an educator preparation program who are pursuing a Primary certificate to complete a minimum of 30 credit hours of early childhood coursework.

To implement these amendments, the Department of Education will need to develop competencies for the new Primary certificate. Following the development of those competencies, the Secretary of Education will need to establish a new assessment for candidates seeking a Primary certificate.

In selecting a new assessment for the Primary certificate, the Secretary of Education should consider whether the assessment includes the following elements:

- The assessment should measure a candidate's knowledge of the early childhood competencies delineated in 24 P.S. § 1202.2 (g)(1), which include understanding of developmental stages, learning theories, curriculum development, instructional strategies, content knowledge, learning environments, observation and assessment methods, and family and community partnerships.
- The assessment should measure a candidate's knowledge of evidence-based practices aligned with the Science of Reading.
- The assessment should include content relevant to classroom management and demonstration of instructional practices utilized in supporting the individual needs of students. Such content may measure a candidate's knowledge of the use of diagnostic assessments, strategies to increase student engagement, and understanding of effective classroom management practices.
- The assessment should be well-aligned to the competencies developed by the Department of Education for the new Primary certificate.
- The assessment should be made available to candidates to complete in modules.
- The assessment should be accessible to candidates through both online and in-person administration.

- Candidates should have access to test preparation materials to support them in preparing for completing the assessment.
- In conjunction with establishing a new Primary certification assessment, the Secretary should determine whether there is an aligned alternative assessment pathway that can be utilized by candidates who do not achieve the qualifying score on the assessment required for certification and who do not meet requirements for certification under the Department of Education's GPA Sliding Scale Policy to supplement areas where a candidate did not demonstrate competencies on the test modules.
- Demonstrating knowledge of evidence-based practices aligned to the Science of Reading should be expected of all candidates who have instructional responsibility for teaching reading, not just candidates pursuing the new Primary certificate. While the assessment required for certification as a Reading Specialist in Pennsylvania includes competencies aligned to the Science of Reading, the Secretary should ensure that these competencies also are measured on the assessments required for candidates pursuing certification in other areas that hold instructional responsibility for reading.
- Over the next three years, the Department of Education should establish a performance-based assessment pathway that may serve as an alternative through which candidates who do not achieve a qualifying score on a certification assessment or who do not meet requirements for certification under the Department of Education's GPA Sliding Scale Policy may demonstrate competencies for certification.

The Department should consider how performance-based assessment measures – such as portfolios of a candidate's work and observations of instruction – may best be utilized to address barriers that candidates for certification may experience with traditional licensure tests while ensuring that Pennsylvania maintains its standards for educator quality. The Department further should consider whether there are certifications for which a performance-based assessment pathway should be prioritized and whether there should be an incremental approach to implementation.

- Multiple stakeholder groups that provided feedback to the Committee identified concerns with a lack of alignment between the content covered in educator preparation program (EPP) coursework and the content covered on related certification assessments. The Secretary of Education should initiate an effort to determine where there are areas of potential misalignment to ensure that the assessments utilized for certification reflect the competencies in the Department's program framework guidelines that provide a roadmap for EPP coursework.
- The Department of Education should review and consider data on a program's certification assessment pass rates as part of the periodic major review conducted for each educator preparation program in the Commonwealth.

- The Department of Education should collect aggregate data on the number of candidates who are recommended for certification based on the Department's GPA Sliding Scale policy. This data should be provided to the State Board of Education when the Board conducts periodic reviews of certification assessment requirements to inform the Board's deliberations.
- To further inform future periodic reviews of certification assessment requirements, the Department of Education should obtain pass rate data from testing vendors that disaggregates data for candidates who are newly-entering the teaching profession and for educators who are pursuing additional certifications. The Department shall determine whether there are actions necessary to ensure that such information is available in the next five years.
- Nearly every stakeholder group that provided feedback to the Committee about certification assessments – including higher education students, classroom teachers, principals, higher education faculty, and educator preparation program deans – expressed concern related to the cost of required licensure assessments. To reduce barriers to entry into the teaching profession, the General Assembly should establish a dedicated line item in the General Fund to support certification assessment fee waivers. Low-income candidates who are seeking to newly enter the teaching profession or who are seeking to become certified in a shortage area as designated by the Pennsylvania Department of Education shall be eligible to apply for a fee waiver.
- The State Board of Education should consult with the Department of Education in considering amendments to the requirements for issuing Intern Certificates set forth in 22 Pa. Code § 49.91 and § 49.151 to provide candidates pursuing certification through an Intern program with a longer timeframe to complete required certification assessments rather than requiring these assessments to be completed prior to issuing these certificates. (Note: Amendments to the Public School Code enacted by Act 47 of 2025 renamed the Intern Certificate referred to in 22 Pa. Code § 49.91 as the Instructional Experience-Based Certificate and in § 49.151 as the Career and Technical Experience-Based Certificate.)