
Educator Licensure Policy 5.502

The Background:

Endorsements indicate the areas for which a licensed teacher is prepared to provide subject-specific instruction. All teachers are required by law to hold a valid Tennessee educator license with an endorsement covering the subjects they teach pursuant to Tennessee State Board of Education (SBE) rule. Currently, Tennessee educators may add additional endorsements through one of four (4) available options, as outlined in Educator Licensure Policy 5.502.

This first read item proposes a new pathway by which educators may add endorsements. This new pathway would allow Tennessee educators with a current professional-level license to earn select additional endorsements by completing an additional endorsement program developed and administered by the Tennessee Department of Education, receiving recommendation for the endorsement by the Department, and submitting qualifying scores on all required content assessments as defined in the Professional Assessments for Tennessee Educators Policy 5.105.

This proposal allows educators to add the following four (4) endorsement areas via the new pathway:

- English as a Second Language (ESL) pre-K-12 (490)
- Special Education Interventionist K-8 (144)
- Special Education Interventionist 6-12 (145)
- Special Education Comprehensive Program (461)

These recommended endorsement areas represent a significant area of need for our state and were deliberately chosen based on Special Education and ESL vacancy data, LEA feedback, and the importance of ensuring all students have access to properly licensed and endorsed teachers. According to Tennessee vacancy data collected in Fall 2020, there were 51 vacancies in Special Education and 20 vacancies in ESL statewide. This translates into thousands of students in these vulnerable and historically underserved groups who are not learning from a properly licensed and endorsed teacher this year. This data demonstrates the need for innovative and immediate action in addition to the multiple options already in place through traditional and alternative educator preparation programs.

The Department has built a robust accountability framework for the pathway into policy language to ensure the program is effective for Tennessee students and teachers, including committing to publish enrollment data and licensure assessment passage rates for candidates disaggregated by endorsement, and an annual presentation to the State Board on implementation progress and the effectiveness of the pathway.

By providing a high-quality option for Tennessee educators to add additional endorsements for free, the Department believes the state can contribute in a unique way to the multiple pathways that are already in place for teachers to add additional endorsements. The Department is committed to building a high-quality, effective program that will translate into measurable gains for Tennessee students

Fiscal Analysis Impact:

T.C.A. § 49-1-212 requires that the Department prepare a fiscal analysis of any policy, rule, or regulation proposed to the State Board of Education. This item has no financial impact on an LEA.

Policy Justification:

T.C.A. § 4-5-230 requires that justification for adopting an item as a policy instead of a rule be submitted to the chair of the Government Operations Committee. This item is proposed to be adopted as a policy because it defines or explains the meaning of a statute or rule and/or concerns only the internal management of state government that does not affect private rights or privileges.

The Recommendation:

The Department of Education recommends acceptance of this item on first reading. The SBE staff concurs with this recommendation.