



November 14, 2018

James T. Meeks
Chairman
Illinois State Board of Education
100 N. First Street
Springfield, IL 62777

Dr. Tony Smith
State Superintendent of Education
Illinois State Board of Education
100 N. First Street
Springfield, IL 62777

Dear Chairman Meeks and Superintendent Smith,

Education leaders in both K-12 and higher education recognize the mounting challenges unfolding across the state as we find it increasingly difficult to attract and retain teachers throughout Illinois. On October 17, 2018, the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) took action on various recommendations from the State Superintendent and staff related to educator shortages in Illinois and the findings of a September 2018 ISBE report. We strongly believe that some of these actions, ostensibly to attract more teachers, bypass important quality, rigor and accreditation standards that historically have produced high quality, long lasting teachers throughout our state. Further, our classroom teachers' response to the Board action is that it fails to address the cause of the teacher shortage.

Specific concerns include:

- Rule-making to allow unaccredited (so far undefined) entities other than institutions of higher education to prepare educators for Illinois licensure in job-embedded settings. ISBE states these changes will remove barriers and create new avenues of entry into the profession while maintaining high standards. How can the state maintain high standards if we can't identify who these future entities are, what standards they follow, or if they are even accredited?
- These proposals include no references to effective models of educator preparation in higher education in Illinois, leading policymakers to conclude that innovative, job-embedded preparation models do not exist among Illinois colleges and universities – when in fact, they do and have been in place in some cases for decades. This omission doesn't change the fact that these programs maintain high edTPA performance assessment and licensure pass rates, and graduates of these programs are effective and stay in the profession. Other important models also exist. For example, community colleges, which serve first-time freshmen as well as returning adults and support the most diverse students in the state, have a long history of program articulation with their university partners. Focusing on these partnerships and building stronger 2 + 2 agreements across teacher education programs is one of several ways to meet the shortage through the existing system.
- Students who enter these proposed, job-embedded programs will have no assurance of the long term value of their course of study, its portability/transferability to other forms of professional employment, and the assurance that appropriate records or transcripts of their work will be maintained by these undefined entities or deemed valid for future use. In contrast, accreditation and other regulatory protections for students are de facto components of educator preparation provided through institutions of higher education.

- Our members tell us that the real cause of the teacher shortage is inadequate salary, pension uncertainty, and demonization of the teaching profession. In addition to the objections we outline to the alternative licensure program, we would add that it is yet another treatment of a symptom of the shortage and not of the shortage itself.
- Ultimately, many of these recommendations will likely compound the educator shortage issue, while factors contributing to teacher attrition go unaddressed. Research on educator shortages is clear: 1) under-prepared individuals who are left to learn on the job are most often placed in high poverty, high minority communities serving our most vulnerable students which serves to exacerbate existing inequities; and 2) these individuals leave teaching at higher rates. Illinois schools will only experience more churn and difficulty in filling educator positions through these approaches.

We, the undersigned, respectfully call on the Illinois State Board of Education to carefully consider the above mentioned concerns before advancing these items to rulemaking and/or the legislative process. Higher education leaders and classroom teachers stand ready to work with you and the K-12 community to ensure that higher education’s contributions in teacher education and development advance our joint efforts to provide equitable access to high-quality learning opportunities for all Illinois students.

Respectfully,

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