

July 7, 2021

Concerned About a Michigan Teacher Shortage? Make it Easier to Become a Teacher

By Jarrett Skorup and Ben DeGrow

Summary

Reforming the state's rules on teacher certification will help schools find the teachers they need.

Main text word count: 601

For decades, voices in the media have repeated the cry about an alleged teacher shortage in Michigan. Finding teachers in some subjects and in some areas of the state is often a challenge. But for the most part, there are still plenty of educators and plenty of applicants for teaching jobs in Michigan school districts. Still, for those concerned that we don't have enough teachers, one answer is to make it easier for schools to welcome qualified educators instead of push them away.

Michigan school districts typically get far more applicants for some positions than others. Think: elementary school, high school English and physical education, versus physics, skilled trades and special education. But, historically, union contracts have made it hard for schools to pay different salaries for different subject areas, which is the most obvious solution to that problem. Things are moving in the right direction, however. Districts like Detroit and Jackson have successfully offered bonus pay to attract teachers to hard-to-fill classrooms.

More districts should do better at marketing themselves to the prospective teachers they need the most, telling them and their preparation programs about credentialing requirements and financial opportunities. Paying teachers based on something other than years of experience and graduate course credits certainly will send the right signal.

But it's also, in part, the state's fault that we have a limited supply of educators. Michigan's teacher licensing and regulatory rules add unnecessary barriers to capable candidates who might enter the education job market. Some of the steps required to earn a teaching certificate are more about checking bureaucratic boxes than ensuring classroom effectiveness.

Michigan has made some progress in opening doors for those who want to enter the teaching profession. The state's list of approved alternative certification programs is growing, a boon for college-educated professionals or school employees who want to teach but don't do so currently. A 2018 law eliminated two key requirements that restricted these classroom pipelines. First, alternative programs no longer have to be tested in another state before they set up shop here. Second, participants in alternative



Changes to teacher certification requirements will help Michigan's schools.

certification programs no longer have to go through the hassle of sitting with high school students to take the SAT again before becoming certified.

Lawmakers are now considering a proposal to reduce another barrier to teaching. House Bill 5056 would make it easier for certified teachers coming from out-of-state to work in a Michigan classroom.

Under current law, these candidates must take the Michigan teacher certification test. The state practices a limited form of reciprocity, but it only considers waiving the testing requirement for individuals with three years of experience and 18 graduate credit hours since certification. This reform paves the way for some veteran teachers already moving with their families into Michigan. But it does nothing for most new educators who might want to come to the Great Lakes State.

HB 5056 would make things better by letting a nationally recognized licensure exam substitute for Michigan's test. This would give Michigan schools a bigger pool of qualified candidates to recruit from. Most other states already have a lower bar for certified teachers transferring from elsewhere — some exempt them from taking another test altogether.

This proposal is another small step forward in cutting the legal red tape people face if they want to teach in public schools in Michigan. School principals who need to add to their teaching staff will benefit. After all, it's the school, not the state government, that hires each teacher. If a local school official thinks a job candidate is qualified, it doesn't make sense for the state to stand in the way.

#####

Jarrett Skorup is the director of marketing and communications and Ben DeGrow is the director of education policy at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy, a research and educational institute in Midland, Michigan. Permission to reprint in whole or in part is hereby granted, provided that the authors and the Mackinac Center are properly cited.

Michigan's teacher licensing and regulatory rules add unnecessary barriers to capable candidates who might enter the education job market.

Attention Editors and Producers

Viewpoint commentaries are provided for reprint in newspapers and other publications. Authors are available for print or broadcast interviews. Electronic text is available for this Viewpoint at mackinac.org/pubs/viewpoints.

Please contact:

Holly Wetzel
Communications Manager
989-698-1927
wetzel@mackinac.org

140 West Main Street
P.O. Box 568
Midland, Mich. 48640

Mackinac.org
Facebook.com/MackinacCenter
Twitter.com/MackinacCenter