



## Wisconsin Association of Colleges for Teacher Education

Affiliated with American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE)

May 25, 2015

TO: Members of the Wisconsin State Assembly and Senate Committees on Education  
FROM: The Executive Committee--Wisconsin Association of Colleges for Teacher Education  
RE: K-12 Omnibus Motion #457

As members of the executive committee of the Wisconsin Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, we write to express our concerns about provisions related to educator preparation and licensure contained in Motion #457, the K-12 Omnibus Motion that was passed by the Joint Committee on Finance on Wednesday, May 20, 2015. This letter takes up several points in reference to the numbered sections and pages of Motion #457, but a general rationale for our concerns precedes discussion of those specific issues.

Our general concern with the licensure provisions in Motion #457 is rooted in our belief that the quality of education provided for adolescents in Wisconsin will be significantly diminished if these proposals are approved. Neuroscience has firmly established that adolescence (ages 12-18) is the second most important period for brain development after infancy. The human brain goes through a period of neuron growth and pruning during these years that will shape capacities for memory, critical thinking, problem solving, and decision making for the emerging adult. In addition, the development of the pre-frontal cortex begins in earnest during this time. Development of this area of the brain allows human beings to make reasoned, ethical decisions for themselves and their communities. Because this important developmental work is accomplished during adolescence, it is of utmost importance that students in grades 6-12 have teachers who are fully prepared to deliver instruction that is content-rich, engaging, and based in best practice. As scholars and professional educators, we believe the proposed licensure regulations in Motion #457 will compromise the quality of adolescent education by putting underprepared teachers in Wisconsin's middle and high school classrooms.

Section 46 *Alternative Teacher License* (pp. 26-27) — Section 46 Alternative Teacher License (pp. 26-27) — Wisconsin already has several alternative licensure programs (e.g., LBE, CESA programs, NORDA) that prepare teachers for high need fields and in high need areas of the state. We recognize that alternative licensing routes are needed to address the need for appropriately skilled teachers for shortage fields, but the extension of an alternative licensure option that bypasses the GPA, testing, course work, and clinical experience requirements for graduates of approved educator preparation programs and alternative licensure programs is not justified.

There is no documented shortage of fully prepared teachers in the fields of English and social studies. Although some data suggests localized shortages in certain mathematics and science disciplines, it is especially critical that alternative and emergency licensure options for these areas lead prospective teachers to become fully prepared in subject matter knowledge, adolescent development, and effective pedagogy. Research has clearly shown that student achievement in mathematics and the sciences improves when teachers are firmly grounded in and use best practices to engage learners with content and differentiate instruction. Allowing teachers with no professional preparation or clinical experience to assume full teaching responsibilities in these critical fields will likely put students in high need rural and urban school districts at greater risk for failure in academic areas critical to the economy of the state. (Please also note that the licensing of underprepared teachers this motion allows cannot possibly meet the “highly qualified” mandate issued by the federal Department of Education.)

We would be remiss, if we did not point out that presently Wisconsin students seeking to become licensed K-12 educators must pass stringent content area tests that document they have the necessary in depth knowledge in the area(s) they wish to teach. They must meet GPA requirements to qualify for student teaching and licensure and must complete a full semester of student teaching in addition to 100 hours of pre-student teaching clinical experience. Beginning in 2016-17, candidates for licensure will demonstrate they have the pedagogical knowledge and skills necessary for effective classroom instruction. The assessment they will complete during student teaching, edTPA, is difficult but will provide reliable and valid evidence that beginning teachers will be highly qualified to teach Wisconsin’s children and adolescents. To allow unprepared teachers into our K-12 classrooms who have not been required to meet these requirements is not only unwise, it is unfair to current college students and their parents, and threatens the very foundation of a strong, competitive workforce.

A further concern with the provisions for Alternative Licensure in Section 46 is related to allowing the “issuance of a teaching permit in any subject areas excluding English, social studies, mathematics, or science if the school board, operator, or governing body of the school district, independent ‘2r’ charter school, or private choice school in which the individual intends to teach determines that the individual is proficient in each subject that he or she intends to teach and that the individual has relevant experiences in each subject that he or she intends to teach.” In addition to the problem of exactly how this proficiency would be determined, there is simply no documentation of teacher shortages in fields such as art, music, theatre, consumer education, etc. to justify this provision. Although these teaching permits would only be valid in the districts/schools for which they are originally issued, this provision completely circumvents the licensing requirements established by the legislature in PI 34. It introduces to the profession individuals who could not meet the stringent academic requirements of approved educator preparation programs, placing individuals with no supervised clinical experience or knowledge of best practices for teaching adolescents in charge of student learning.

Finally, Section 46 requires DPI to offer an online teacher training program for those who hold a license or permit based on a school board’s recommendation. DPI is an administrative agency of the state government. It is not an institution of higher education, and its personnel are not generally trained as teacher educators or developers of teaching training curricula. With thirty-three approved educator preparation programs in the state and several functioning

alternative licensure programs, it is not ethical to give responsibility for educating underprepared teachers to an agency that is not designed or staffed to do that work. On those rare occasions when an underprepared teacher must be placed as the teacher of record in a middle/secondary school classroom, that teacher and his/her students deserve to have expert, on-going support in the development of their teaching skills. As an alternative to a DPI-based on-line program, the legislature should call upon the approved teacher education programs to design and deliver support programs that will bring these emergency license teachers to full competence and qualification for a permanent license within a specified and relatively short time period. The work that Alverno College and Marquette University are doing with the Teach for American program in Milwaukee provides an example of how higher education can work effectively to accomplish this goal.

Section 48 *Regional or National Accreditation of Teacher Education Programs (p. 27)* - In compliance with PI 34, educator preparation programs in Wisconsin are reviewed annually by DPI personnel in an outcome-based and data-driven Continuous Review Process, with a more intensive review every five years. We are confident that Wisconsin's standards for state approval are both extensive and rigorous. In addition, the national accrediting body for educator preparation approved by the federal Department of Education, the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), is in considerable turmoil, and approximately half of Wisconsin's institutions that were participating have withdrawn from it. In addition to significant organizational problems within CAEP, many (perhaps the majority) of Wisconsin's colleges and universities have chosen not to seek CAEP accreditation because of its excessive financial cost, both in terms of accreditation and program review fees. The extra workload the accreditation process imposes on an institution—money and time is better spent on direct work with teacher candidates. Moreover, we do not understand why the state would turn to outside agencies to accredit Wisconsin's educator preparation programs when the review teams for those agencies are not familiar with Wisconsin's PI 34 requirements, the CAEP standards are not aligned with PI 34 standards or requirements and, perhaps as important, there is no evidence that accreditation by CAEP results in producing better K-12 educators.

We understand that the process of crafting a state budget is complex and must be accomplished within a restricted time frame. However, we are disappointed that measures related to teacher licensure were introduced late in the process and were not the subject of outside review, debate, or public scrutiny before they were voted on in the Joint Finance Committee. This is unacceptable.

As the proposed licensure provisions primarily will affect the teachers in grades 6-12, we are deeply disappointed that greater weight was not given to the need for highly qualified teachers for adolescents during a critical period in their cognitive development. Grades 6-12 teachers do need to know their subject matter, but that is not sufficient to qualify them for the important work of teaching adolescents. They must also understand adolescent development, know the goals and objectives of the middle/secondary curriculum, and be skilled in implementing best practices to engage all learners in mastery of critical subject matter. That corpus of professional knowledge is best developed through an approved, PI 34-compliant educator preparation program. When circumstances require that a less than fully prepared teacher be hired in a middle or secondary school, a professional development program based in an educator preparation institution can support the novice teacher as he/she works to meet

all state licensure requirements. Institutions across the state already work effectively with school districts to fill this role, and we are sure that many public and private institutions are willing to expand their work in this area if called on to do so by the legislature.

All of our PK-12 schools and all of our students deserve highly qualified, enthusiastic, career teachers. We hope you will review Sections 46 and 48 of Motion #457 and propose amendments to the final budget bill to address the concerns raised in this letter. We look forward to working with you in the future to insure that Wisconsin's adolescents have the most qualified teachers possible during their middle and high school years.

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