
SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Senator Benjamin Allen, Chair

2017 - 2018 Regular

Bill No: AB 170 **Hearing Date:** June 7, 2017
Author: O'Donnell
Version: January 17, 2017
Urgency: No **Fiscal:** Yes
Consultant: Ian Johnson

Subject: Teacher credentialing

SUMMARY

This bill authorizes an individual possessing a baccalaureate degree in professional education to be awarded a multiple subject preliminary teaching credential by the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC).

BACKGROUND

Existing law:

- 1) Requires the CTC to establish professional standards, assessments, and examinations for entry and advancement in the education profession.
- 2) States that the preliminary teaching credential is to be granted upon:
 - a) Possession of a baccalaureate degree from a regionally accredited institution in a subject other than professional education
 - b) Completion of an accredited program of professional preparation, and either successful passage of an examination or assessment that has been adopted or approved by the commission in the subject or subjects appropriate to the grade level to be taught, or completion of an accredited program of subject matter preparation and successful passage of a basic skills proficiency test.
- 3) Establishes among the minimum requirements for the preliminary multiple or single subject teaching credential the possession of a baccalaureate degree or higher degree from a regionally accredited institution of postsecondary education.
- 4) Requires the CTC to encourage accredited institutions to offer undergraduate minors in education and special education to students who intend to become teachers.
- 5) Federal law regarding eligibility for Pell Grants permits students enrolled in teacher preparation programs to receive a basic grant if they meet certain requirements and are not enrolled in an institution of higher education that offers a baccalaureate degree in education.

ANALYSIS

This bill removes the prohibition on the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) from awarding multiple subject preliminary teaching credentials to individuals who possess baccalaureate degrees in professional education.

STAFF COMMENTS

- 1) ***Need for the bill.*** According to the author, “Under current law, the only subject teachers cannot major in during college is education.

AB 170 removes this prohibition for elementary and middle school teachers, allowing universities to design education majors for prospective teachers, giving faculty the flexibility to design and offer an education major if, in their professional opinion, such a program would strengthen their teachers’ preparation for the classroom. Teachers would still be required to pass a subject matter competency examination to earn their credential, and the major would still need to meet the subject matter standards of undergraduate preparation established by the Commission on Teacher Credentialing.

The decision to prohibit teachers from majoring in education was made during the Sputnik-era, when subject matter knowledge was viewed as paramount, and pedagogical training was viewed as suspect and largely unnecessary. But while subject matter knowledge is clearly required for effective teaching, it is certainly not sufficient. The prohibition on majoring education has pushed training in the complex “how” of teaching into an increasingly crowded, year or two of study.

The current prohibition on studying education also predates many important developments in public education, including the inclusion of students with disabilities, large numbers of English learners, and the use of technology for instruction and assessment - changes which require a higher level of pedagogical skill. Recent movement toward a “common trunk” of preparation for general education and special education teachers will also increase time required for pedagogical training.

The advent of the Common Core State Standards and the Next Generation Science Standards - which emphasize inquiry, depth of understanding, communication, and application of concepts over rote memorization and teacher-directed learning – makes pedagogical skill even more critical.

Authorizing multiple subject teachers to earn a baccalaureate degree in education would allow future teachers to spend more time gaining critical knowledge and skills about how to instruct our students.”

- 2) ***Background on education major prohibition.*** The prohibition on teachers majoring in education as undergraduates dates back to the Fisher Act of 1961. According to CTC history, “profound international and national happenings merged alternately with purely California considerations to result in a climatic session of the 1961 Legislature.” Notably, the 1961 legislature dealt with “an aggressive drive by the Soviet Union toward some kind of world supremacy,”

combined with a strong dislike and distrust of professional “educationalists.” The Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) history notes that “this storm of public criticism reached its peak in 1958, incited by the Soviet launch of Sputnik in fall of 1957.” Two organizations formed to lobby on this issue in the 1950’s. The Council for Basic Education (which remained active until 2004) and the Committee for Improving Teacher Education, led by university presidents, Nobel laureates, an encyclopedia editor, and “pointedly lacking traditional professional educators.” These organizations argued that “...while professional education departments might be tolerated, they should serve a minor role in teacher preparation.” They argued that the schools “had added many ‘frills’ and non-essentials to the curriculum; they had employed teachers who had been thoroughly ‘brainwashed’ by the college departments of education.” They sought to “reduce drastically the ‘professional’ preparation of teachers.”

- 3) ***Significant changes in education.*** Since the 1960’s, public education in California has changed significantly, including the federal entitlement of students with disabilities to a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment, large numbers of English learners and a more culturally diverse student population, and the use of technology for instruction and assessments. Further, the adoption of the Common Core State Standards and an increasing focus on school climate and social and emotional learning in support of academic achievement require a higher level of pedagogical skill.
- 4) ***How is subject matter expertise ensured?*** Teachers are required to demonstrate subject matter competence, either by passing an examination or completing a CTC-approved subject matter program, to earn their credential. Subject matter competency must be completed prior to student teaching. Moreover, federal law requires all teachers to be “highly qualified” in core academic subject areas. Each of these requirements would remain in place under this bill.
- 5) ***Would universities develop education majors for teacher candidates?*** Due to restrictions at the federal level related to financial aid, it is unclear whether this bill will result in any new programs being designed by the universities. Specifically, federal law allows students receiving Pell Grants to extend their award for an additional year of post-baccalaureate study leading to a teaching credential. However, to be eligible for this Pell Grant extension, a student must be pursuing their credential from an institution that does not offer a baccalaureate degree in education. Therefore, absent a change in the law at the federal level, it may be unlikely that the universities would design new programs authorized by this bill that would cause other students to lose their Pell Grant eligibility.
- 6) ***Arguments in support.*** According to supporters of this bill, removing the prohibition on teaching candidates holding a degree in professional education authorizes universities to develop education majors that provide longer and more in-depth pedagogical training. The current practice of compressing everything a teacher is expected to know into a fifth-year of post-graduate study allows very little time for credential candidates to develop and practice their teaching techniques, including the field experience component—interning as a student teacher in a real classroom.

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OPPOSITION

None received

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