



**House Education Committee  
Informational Meeting  
Teacher Certification in the Commonwealth  
February 25, 2025, at 10am, 515 IOB**

- 10:00am      Call to Order  
                 Committee Member Introductions  
                 Opening Remarks- Chairman Schweyer
- 10:10am      Panel 1-  
  
                 Ms. Tiffany McDole, Policy Director \*  
                 Education Commission of the States
- 10:45am      Panel 2-  
  
                 Dr. Monika Williams Shealey, Dean and Professor  
                 College of Education and Human Development, Temple University
- 11:20am      Panel 3-  
  
                 Mr. Aaron Chapin, President  
                 PA State Education Association and Stroudsburg Area Middle School Teacher  
  
                 Ms. Emily Sagor, PA Policy Manager  
                 Teach Plus PA  
  
                 Mr. Guy Ferguson, Policy Fellow  
                 Teach Plus PA and 4th Grade Bilingual Teacher  
  
                 Mr. John Pulver, Executive Director  
                 Pennsylvania Association of Career & Technical Administrators
- 11:50am      Closing Remarks/Adjournment

*All times are approximate and include time for questions.*  
Live streamed at [www.pahouse.com/live](http://www.pahouse.com/live)

\*Virtual Testifier

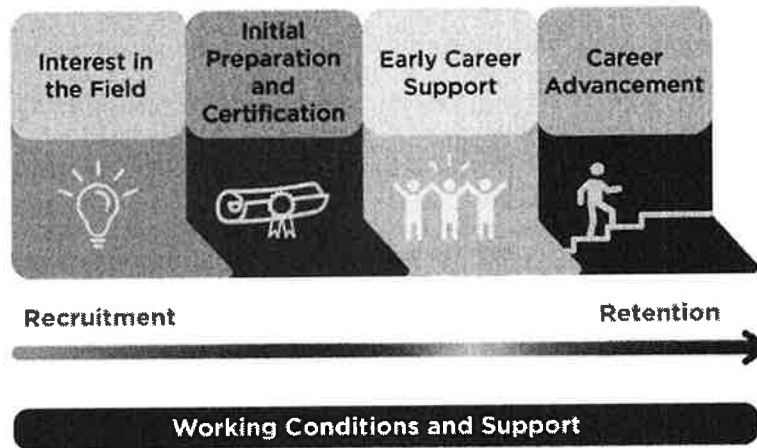
*Written Testimony:*

Mr. Sharif El-Mekki, CEO  
The Center for Black Educator Development



## This response was prepared for The Pennsylvania House Education Committee.

State leaders continue to grapple with concentrated and persistent teacher shortages in specific subjects, schools, and localities. These shortages have an outsized impact on students of color, students in low-income communities, and students in rural communities. Education Commission of the States provides a framework for a comprehensive approach to investing in a strong teacher pipeline (pictured below) that begins with increasing interest in the field through career advancement opportunities for veteran teachers. For more information, see our 50-State Comparison on Teacher Recruitment & Retention.



This response focuses on state policies related to **initial certification for teachers**, particularly barriers aspiring teachers may face in achieving certification and how states are addressing such barriers. When considering policies around licensure, policymakers balance the need to fill vacant positions with the need to maintain a highly qualified teacher workforce. Achieving this balance requires ongoing research regarding which licensure requirements are meaningfully related to teacher quality – including researching the impact of modifications to requirements.

### Cost of Initial Certification

The cost of obtaining a teaching certificate can be a barrier for many aspiring teacher candidates as they work through the required training and state certification processes. State policymakers have focused on two primary cost barriers: the fees associated with licensure applications and tests and the cost of completing required training.

#### Fees

Many states require prospective teachers to pay a fee along with their initial licensure application or licensure renewal application, often in addition to the fees required to take required licensure assessments. These fees may serve as a barrier to otherwise qualified prospective teachers. Some states have taken recent action to lessen or remove such fees.

### *State Examples*

**Arizona** added a requirement for teachers who teach English language arts for grades K-5 to get a literacy endorsement. To support teachers in completing the requirement, the state will cover the cost of taking the exam once for teachers who are teaching but need the endorsement or are new teachers.

**Colorado** awards funds to reduce financial barriers for eligible students who are taking licensure exams. Students who receive the stipend must be within 250% Pell eligibility and follow CDHE guidance set out by H.B. 22-1220 (2022). Stipends are distributed to educator preparation programs to be disbursed to students to pay the fees and costs for exams.

**Illinois** H.B. 4246 (2022, enacted) reduces the fee related the reinstatement of a lapsed Professional Educator License from \$500 to \$50.

**Indiana** offers free retests of the Praxis exam for certain qualifying students. The students must have at least a 3.0 GPA, missed the passing score by no more than three points, and have only taken the test one time.

**Massachusetts** has a voucher system to cover licensure test fees through educator preparation programs. The programs can also purchase additional vouchers for their students.

### **Cost of Training**

To address the costs associated with traditional educator preparation programs (and college generally), many states provide financial incentives to teacher candidates broadly, often in the form of scholarships to enroll in education preparation programs or loan forgiveness programs. According to Education Commission of the States' 50-State Comparison on Teacher Recruitment and Retention, 38 states and D.C. have at least one such program in statute to recruit teachers to underserved schools and/or shortage subject areas.

A growing trend in state policy is to address the cost burden of requiring clinical experience as a part of teacher training, allowing student teachers to be compensated or provide grant/scholarship opportunities for students while they complete their training. The state examples below in addition to Pennsylvania H.B. 301 (2024, enacted), which created the Educator Pipeline Support Grant Program.

### *State Examples*

**Colorado:** HB 22-1220 (2022, enacted) creates the Student Educator Stipend Program and requires the department of education to collect data to measure the effectiveness of the stipend program. Eligible students in a 16-week residency may receive up to \$11,000 and students in a 32-week residency may receive up to \$22,000. Program evaluators have noted that early results show the program made a difference in teacher candidates continuing their preparation. Candidates reported lower anxiety and reported using the funds for primary living expenses, such as housing and food. In addition, the Colorado Center for Rural Education and the Colorado Department of Higher Education administer the Colorado Rural Teaching Stipend, with a stipend of up to \$4,000 for students who complete their final student teaching experience in a rural district and commit to teaching in a rural district for at least two years.

**Indiana:** Ind. Code Ann. § 21-13-7-1 provides requirements for the Student Teaching Stipend for High-Need Fields. Applicants may receive a scholarship of up to \$4,000. Ind. Code Ann. § 21-13-8-1 establishes and outlines

requirements for the Earline S. Rogers Student Teaching Scholarship for Minority Students. The scholarship is also up to \$4,000 and requires recipients, if hired, to teach for three years following educator preparation.

**Maryland:** H.B. 1219 (2023, enacted), the Educator Shortage Reduction Act, creates the Teacher Development and Retention Program, including a pilot of financial support for candidates interested in pursuing the teaching profession. Candidates must begin their teacher preparation at an institute in Maryland with at least 40% of attendees receiving a Pell Grant. The financial support consists of two parts: an initial one-time stipend for participation in an experiential learning opportunity in a classroom and an educator internship stipend. The initial stipend amount is up to \$3,500. The internship stipends may be up to \$20,000 for a 10-month educator internship. Eligible candidates must pledge to teach in a high-needs school, grade level or content area in which there is a shortage of teachers for at least two years.

**Michigan:** The legislature established the MI Future Educator Student Teacher Stipend program. Eligible students receive a \$9,600 stipend per semester of student teaching. The stipend is available on a first-come, first-served basis.

**Minnesota:** Statute outlines two grant programs to provide financial assistance to students enrolled in teacher preparation programs that require at least 12 weeks of student teaching. The first program provides student teacher grants for students from low-income communities who intend to teach in a license shortage area or rural school district in shortage areas (Minn. Stat. Ann. § 136A.1275). The second program provides grants for underrepresented student teachers (Minn. Stat. Ann. § 136A.1274). Eligible students can receive awards of up to \$7,500 for one term in which they are completing the required student teaching experience. Both programs are also highlighted here.

**North Dakota** N.D. Admin. Code 67.1-02-01-01 allows student teachers to receive a stipend from the school where they have student taught.

**Utah** H.B. 221 (2024, enacted) creates the Stipends for Future Educators program. The stipend is an award of up to \$6,000 per student teacher. There is only one year of funding (2024-25) for the student teacher stipend at this time.

## Licensure Assessments

Educators and policymakers have raised concerns that teacher licensure exams may not be an effective tool for measuring quality, and therefore unintentionally keeping qualified candidates out of the classroom. There is some evidence these exams may be particularly costly for efforts to diversify the teacher workforce.

Given these considerations, many states are considering alternatives to licensure exams, exemptions to exams, and support to candidates to take and pass the relevant state licensure exams. It is important to note that research is mixed on the value of licensure exams, with some advocates promoting improving exams and the preparation of candidates rather than replacing licensure assessments.

### State Examples

**California** A.B. 130 (2021, enacted) exempts teacher candidates from the basic skills proficiency test requirement if they earn at least a letter grade of B in qualifying coursework. The bill also exempts an applicant who has demonstrated proficiency in the basic skills through a combination of qualifying coursework, passage of components of the state basic skills proficiency test and scores on certain tests. The bill also exempts candidates for certain credentials from the subject matter exam if they: 1) complete a subject matter program approved by the commission; 2) complete coursework that addresses each of the domains of the subject matter requirements or a

professional program reviews transcripts and confirms that each domain has been addressed; or 3) addresses each of the domains of subject matter requirements through a combination of subtests and coursework.

**Colorado:** H.B. 22-1220 (2022, enacted) awards stipends to approved teacher preparation programs to cover the costs for eligible students for assessments required for licensure and endorsements, as well as additional costs incurred such as travel and lodging. In addition, the bill amended requirements for a multiple measures approach to teacher licensure. Beginning in the 2023-24 school year, candidates for initial licensure may demonstrate professional competencies through an approved assessment, approved coursework, or grades earned within relevant courses.

**Delaware** H.B. 207 (2021, enacted) removes the requirement that applicants for initial and continuing educator licenses obtain a passing score on an approved performance assessment. In place of the performance assessment requirement, the bill requires an assessment of abilities to apply pedagogical skills to meet the needs of students and requires the department of education to establish a committee of stakeholders to gather input and make recommendations on how to assess the pedagogical skills of program participants.

**Illinois:** S.B. 2043 (2021, enacted) amends provisions for teacher certification, removing the requirement to demonstrate English language proficiency. Additionally, in 2019, the state passed S.B. 1952, which permanently eliminated the test of basic skills as a requirement for educator licensure, including for out-of-state teachers.

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is piloting alternatives to the Massachusetts Tests for Educator Licensure (MTEL), aiming “to create and evaluate increased flexibility in assessments for educator licensure.” The commissioner has approved three alternative assessments to pilot. In addition, Massachusetts also offers MTEL-Flex, which is a flexible testing option for eligible teacher candidates that came very close to the passing score of the MTEL test.

**New Jersey** S. 4074 (2022, enacted) eliminates the requirement to pass a basic skills test as a condition of eligibility for a standard instructional certificate in a CTE endorsement. In addition, for a certificate of eligibility with advanced standing in a CTE endorsement the candidate can demonstrate proficiency in the use of the English language and math through an alternate measure approved by the department of education.

**Oklahoma** H.B. 3658 (2022, enacted) removes the requirement that teacher candidates pass the general education portion of the competency examination. The bill redefines “competency examination” as “the assessment required in the Oklahoma Teacher Preparation Act for certification as a teacher and shall consist of tests over general education, professional education and subject areas as defined by the Commission for Educational Quality and Accountability.”

**Washington:** H.B. 1028 (2021, enacted) repeals requirements related to the educator performance assessment (edTPA). The bill also amends provisions regarding educator preparation program certification recommendations, specifying that candidates should demonstrate effectiveness through multiple measures and requires educator preparation programs to publish a list of program completion requirements.

## **Additional Considerations**

### **Degree Completion**

As states analyze “leaks” in their pipeline of teachers, one clear source is individuals who enroll in educator preparation programs but do not complete their degree. According to Title II data, national program completion

peaked in 2008, with almost 209,000 graduates. Completion has declined since, with only 156,089 program completers in 2021-22, the most recent data available. This decline is partially due to a decline in program enrollment, which is down about 30% over a ten year period. Completion rates have declined about 25% in the same period. Most of this decline is concentrated in traditional educator preparation programs. Alternative preparation programs have seen an increase in enrollment and completion numbers in many states.

### Labor Market Misalignment

Some scholars prefer to use describe the teacher labor market as having "distribution challenges" as opposed to "shortages," as national data suggests we have more certified teachers in the country than teaching positions and we graduate more new teachers than annual vacancies. But, these aggregated data hide well documented challenges filling *specific* vacancies – usually in specific schools or specific subjects.

The challenge for policymakers becomes designing and implementing programs to address these specific holes in the labor market. For example, research suggests that teachers are more likely to stay in teaching when they are hired into environments that mirror their student teaching placement. States may consider how to support districts and educator preparation programs to match student teachers with the schools where they are most needed. As an example, see the Colorado Rural Teaching Stipend mentioned above. Additionally, as states consider addressing barriers to licensure, it may be particularly important to address barriers for the subjects with the most severe shortages, such as special education or STEM fields.

### Movement Across State Lines

Teacher labor markets tend to be hyperlocal, with young teachers being much more likely than their college peers to live close to where they grew up. But other teachers may pursue training away from where they seek to live and work and/or move multiple times within their career. The process of initiating a license outside of the state where you received training or moving a license across state lines can pose additional barriers to potential teachers. Most commonly, these barriers include additional coursework or additional training. In response, many states have examined their policies on license reciprocity. A group of 13 states, including Pennsylvania, have recently enacted the Teacher Mobility Compact to better facilitate the transfer of full licenses across state lines.

## Comments for testimony to PA House Education Committee

**Majority Chair: Rep. Pete Schweyer**

**Minority Chair: Rep. Bryan Cutler**

**Dean Monika Williams Shealey, Ph.D. Temple University, College of Education and Human Development**

**Tuesday, February 25, 2025**

Thank you, Majority Chair Schweyer, Minority Chair Bryan Cutler, and esteemed members of the House Education Committee, for the opportunity to speak to you today about the state of educator preparation from my vantage point as dean of a college of education and human development at a research extensive institution in a large urban metropolitan area. My comments are specifically focused on teacher recruitment and retention and are framed by my experience as a former special education teacher in Florida and then as faculty in higher education in Florida, Wisconsin, Missouri, and most recently as dean in New Jersey and now in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

In the 2022-23 academic year, approximately 9,500 teachers left the profession, resulting in a 7.7% attrition rate—the highest on record. Such turnover exacerbates the existing teacher shortage and underscores the need for improved support and retention strategies (Pennsylvania Teacher Attrition and Turnover from 2014 to 2024, [Center for Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis | Blogs from CEEPA](#)).

### 1. Recruitment

- Mitigate the costs of tuition
  - Extend enrollment in the Dual Credit Innovation Grant to Temple University  
<https://www.pa.gov/agencies/education/programs-and-services/instruction/postsecondary-and-adult-education/dual-credit-innovation-grant-program.html>
  - Expand and further promote [GROW PA](#) scholarship support for aspiring teachers
- Support the hiring of a new Chief Talent Officer in PDE.
- Fund the Educator Talent Recruitment account so that the Chief Talent Officer has resources to support specific initiatives of the [PA Educator Workforce Strategy](#) (with progress and recommended next steps included in the [December 2024 report](#)), and those championed by members of the Educator Talent Recruitment Committee
- Certification Test and Application Fees
  - Cover the cost of certification tests taken the first time
  - Eliminate the PA certification application fees for candidates
- It was not unusual in the past for undergraduate students to be out of compliance with college policy that states that students must renew clearances annually. These students would share with advisors (and other staff who have direct interactions) that they delayed securing their clearances due to financial constraints. Delaying securing clearances resulted in delaying their registration for courses that require them. The Temple CEHD addressed this by implementing a fee for specific

undergraduate courses that require clearances. Implementing this fee allows the costs of securing the clearances to be covered by financial aid, alleviating the burden of out-of-pocket expenses.

- We support legislative efforts, such as Senate Bill 843, which will result in PA joining the Interstate Teacher Mobility Compact, facilitating smoother transitions for out-of-state teachers (Pennsylvania Teacher Attrition and Turnover from 2014 to 2024, [Center for Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis | Blogs from CEEPA](#))

## 2. Opportunities and Promising Practices

- Citywide Teacher Recruitment Campaign ([TeachPHL](#)) – An outreach and marketing campaign aimed at providing resources to aspiring teachers.
- Early Pipeline Development – Expanding high school Career Technical Education and pre-apprenticeship programs to engage students in the teaching profession early.
- Para-to-Teacher Programs – Supporting paraprofessionals in their path to earning full teaching certifications.
- Teacher Residency Programs – Strengthening hands-on training and mentorship for aspiring teachers via a paid, one-year residency in a Philadelphia school.
- Service scholarships and loan forgiveness in exchange for a commitment to teach in high-need schools or subject areas, typically for at least 4 years.
- Ramp up implementation of competency-based standards for Career and Technical Education teachers.

## 3. The role of PDE

- Encourage school districts to take advantage of Title II's optional 3% leadership set-aside funds that enable states to strengthen the quality of school leaders by investing in principal recruitment, preparation, induction, and development focused on supportive school leadership.





**Testimony of the  
Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA)**

**Informational Meeting Regarding  
Educator Certification**

**Presented to the  
House Education Committee**

**Feb. 25, 2025**

**By**

**Aaron Chapin**

**PSEA President**



Good morning, Chairman Schweyer, Chairman Cutler, and members of the House Education Committee. My name is Aaron Chapin, and I am the President of the Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA). Thank you for inviting me to share PSEA's recommendations for ensuring educator certification is designed to meet the intended goal – prepared and qualified individuals teaching and supporting our students.

Before I was elected to PSEA's leadership team, I was a fourth and fifth grade teacher for 30 years at the Stroudsburg Area Middle School in Monroe County. I received my bachelor's degree in elementary education from Penn State University, after which I received my K-6 Elementary Certificate. To achieve my permanent (Instructional II) certificate, I received my master's degree in education from Wilkes University. My certificate means a great deal to me, as it does to every teacher I know. It represents a formative decision to enter public service as an elementary school teacher and improve the lives of hundreds of children in the process. It represents a commitment to improve my craft and expand my knowledge so I could be a better teacher for students, and better servant of my community.

PSEA appreciates the Committee's focus on evaluating the Commonwealth's certification system. And we also appreciate the work of Governor Shapiro's administration to speed up the system to process certification applications. It is only logical that policymakers examine the system as Pennsylvania continues to grapple with the educator shortage. It is vital for policymakers to implement a cohesive policy framework – including improved access for securing high-quality certification – to ensure the commonwealth recruits and retains our best and brightest. As you consider and evaluate proposals, I urge you to ask two key questions:

1. Does this proposal demonstrate **respect for educators as professionals** and value the effort invested in securing and maintaining their certification?
2. Does this proposal ensure **schools are staffed with enough certified personnel** who are equipped to meet the demands of today's classrooms and provide students with what they need?

Proper certification matters. It demonstrates to the public that an educator has met national and state standards and has demonstrated they have the skills and knowledge needed to effectively

support student learning and success. It provides clear recognition within the school community of fellow qualified professionals who can offer valuable contributions and input.

Before I address PSEA’s recommendations, I want to quickly summarize the most common way a person becomes a certified teacher in Pennsylvania. First, one must earn a bachelor’s degree, which includes successfully completing at least 12 weeks of student teaching and earning at least a 3.0 GPA in a Department-approved educator preparation program. Then candidates must take and pass subject matter test(s) related to the certification area to receive an Instructional I certificate. Within six years, candidates must complete at least 24 post-baccalaureate credits to move to their permanent Instructional II certificate. In my experience, most teachers get their master’s degrees at this point, because it takes only six additional credits. And while all of this is happening and continuing until retirement, educators are undergoing annual evaluations by a chief school administrator, participating in training mandated by state law and completing their professional development requirements every five years.<sup>1</sup>

Ensuring high quality preparation for teaching and working in today’s increasingly complex school environment is essential. Teachers today face increasing training requirements from the General Assembly; more and more students with diverse and complex mental, emotional, and physical needs; intense pressures of high stakes standardized testing; and the need to keep our students and themselves safe from violent threats. It is essential that any solutions proposed by policymakers maintain high quality preparation and do not lower standards for certification nor undermine the certification requirement.<sup>2</sup>

When Pennsylvania was first undergoing its review of state regulations for the certification of professional personnel, Chapter 49, the Learning Policy Institute provided the Department and

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<sup>1</sup> Educators must earn six semester credits of collegiate study; OR six credits of PDE-approved continuing professional education courses; OR 180 hours of continuing professional education programs, activities or learning experiences through a PDE approved provider; OR any combination of these equivalent to 180 hours every five years to maintain an active certification status.

<sup>2</sup> Research demonstrates that public schools where certification is not universally required have higher attrition rates. A recent study on the educator shortage determined that, “across all 15 years of experience, the attrition rate for teachers in charter schools was substantially greater than for teachers in school districts.... The much greater attrition rates for teachers in their first three years of experience in charter schools is partially due to the hiring of a substantial number of teachers without certification.” *Pennsylvania Teacher Staffing Challenges*. Dr. Edward Fuller. Penn State College of Education – Center for Evaluation and Education Policy Analysis. Fall 2022.

the State Board of Education with findings and recommendations specific to certification that we believe are still timely today:

*Specifically, the goal should be to provide the necessary supports and structures to ensure every individual working within the public school system has the requisite knowledge and skills to support each and every child. Underprepared or unqualified individuals in any position hinder schoolwide efforts to meet the needs of all students and can contribute to teacher attrition. The skills and expertise of all staff should be effectively developed and utilized as part of a comprehensive vision for school and student success.”<sup>3</sup>*

**This vision stands for our teaching professionals but also for our non-teaching professionals as well. Together, they support the needs of the whole child to optimize learning success and each of them deserves respect and recognition for what they bring to the table.**

But the current definition of “professional employe” in Section 1101 of the Pennsylvania Public School Code does not guarantee any protections or rights to professional staff - such as Behavior Analysts, Orientation and Mobility Specialists, Physical Therapists, and Occupational Therapists - who are employed in positions that are not explicitly captured in the current definition of “professional employe” or for which there is no corresponding certificate. This definition has not been revised for over 50 years.

These professionals have successfully completed rigorous educational requirements and clinical experiences, as well as attainment of advanced degrees and professional credentials, and are consistently subject to numerous requirements and responsibilities including Act 82 (educator evaluation) and Act 48 (continuing professional development requirements) applicable to “professional employes” in the School Code.

And while many school entities do recognize these individuals as professionals - granting them tenure, realignment rights, sabbatical leave rights, transfer-between-entity rights, or other Article XI-style rights – local recognition is not the same as consistent recognition under the law. This

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<sup>3</sup> Ryan Saunders, Tara Kini, and Linda Darling-Hammond. *Examining Educator Certification in Pennsylvania: Research and Recommendations for Chapter 49*. Learning Policy Institute. 2018.

must be rectified. It is time to modernize Section 1101 and other relevant School Code provisions to more accurately reflect the various individuals that ensure students have the services they need to succeed both inside and outside the classroom.

Licensure for a profession is important, but it is not the same as *certification* for a prek-12 school environment. Certification ensures professionals have essential content and practice knowledge and skills, but also a deeper understanding of the needs and complexities of today’s students and school systems. Simply having a Certification Staffing Policy Guideline (CSPG) issued by the Department recognizing that a professional with licensure *can* be employed in a school district is *not* certification. For more than a decade, licensed social workers working in schools told PSEA and policymakers that licensure was not sufficient to prepare those professionals to practice social work in the public school setting. Finally, in 2021 —after more than a decade of advocacy navigating an unclear and subjective process – PSEA was successful in securing the creation of the school social worker certificate, with the full implementation of CSPG 87 by August of 2026. This is not how the process should work.

*Recommendation 1: Greater Transparency in Certification Process*

PDE should adopt an objective, timely, and transparent process for evaluating certifications to provide better alignment between the current roles and demands of professionals working within our schools and meeting the complex needs of today’s students.

In 2018 when the Department and the State Board began their comprehensive review of Chapter 49, PSEA strongly advocated for revisions to Sections 49.51 - 49.53 to create a structure to receive public requests for new, modified, or discontinued certification subject areas with a *clearly defined and transparent process for reviewing and responding to these requests.*

Unfortunately, no such changes were proposed by the Department nor included in the final rulemaking for Chapter 49. *While there is a process in the regulations for the State Board and the Department to receive requests for a new “type/category of certificate,” there is no such corresponding process for receiving requests specific to subject areas within the various categories of certificates. No objective, transparent, and timely process currently exists for the Department to receive, review and respond to public requests for new, modified or discontinued certification subject areas.* The result is a system that neither approves nor denies requests from

professionals who are employed by public schools and who are seeking certification to improve their preparation and professional practice.

*Recommendation 2: Reduce financial burdens of securing certification*

I would be remiss if I didn't mention the importance of the Student Teacher Support program within the context of certification. PSEA appreciates that this Committee has undertaken a bipartisan effort to solicit information, carefully consider ideas proposed by stakeholders and advance targeted solutions over the past two years to respond to the educator shortage crisis. This Committee deserves tremendous credit for prioritizing and leading an effort to establish the Student Teacher Support program, which provides financial support to eligible student teachers during the 12-week student teacher experience, incentivizes more qualified educators to become cooperating teachers, and ensures that those aspiring educators stay in Pennsylvania for at least three years post-graduation. I want to take a moment to recognize the leadership of Rep. Danielle Friel Otten, Rep. Gina Curry, and Chairman Schweyer who responded to the call of our future teachers around the state. The three of you, working on a bipartisan basis in the House, as well as the Senate, have removed a significant barrier to becoming a teacher, and we are grateful for your work.

This year, Pennsylvania distributed over 2,100 stipends to students using about \$27 million in available state funding. But according to PHEAA, 50 percent of applicants weren't able to receive a stipend this spring due to the lack of available state funding. I would urge this Committee to support Gov. Shapiro's proposed funding level of \$40 million for the program in FY 25-26 and look for opportunities to do more. PSEA estimates that the program requires at least \$50 million in total funding for FY 25-26 to ensure all eligible student teachers receive a stipend, as well as support the bonuses available to eligible student teachers who perform their student teacher experience in a high-vacancy school entity.

After completing their student teacher experience, aspiring educators might graduate with jobs lined up for the following school year, but they can incur hundreds of dollars in initial fees to receive their Instructional I certificate before they even prepare their first classroom.

Pennsylvania requires assessment of teacher candidates in General Knowledge, Professional Knowledge and Subject Area Knowledge prior to issuance of a certificate. In Pennsylvania,

teacher candidates take assessments through ETS (Praxis) or Pearson and pay fees to these companies to sit for the exams. Then candidates must pay an application fee to the Department. Each application or request for certification submitted to the Department includes a \$200 fee – even for certification add-ons. And finally, candidates must pay for the associated background checks to submit to their potential (or current) employers at a cost of \$59.95 every five years.

All of this is on top of the reality that Pennsylvania’s statutory minimum salary for teachers hasn’t increased in over 30 years!

Here are a few examples of teacher candidates and how much they paid in fees before ever receiving their first paycheck:

*Teacher Candidate A – Seeking Prek-4 Certification*

- ETS Praxis Exam for Prek-4 (three modules) - \$131
- Application fee to PDE - \$200
- Background checks - \$59.95
- **Total Cost - \$390.95**

*Teacher Candidate B – Seeking Pre-k -12 Special Education Certification*

- Pearson Assessment K-8 (two modules) - \$87
- Pearson Assessment 7-12 (two modules) - \$87
- ETS Fundamental Subjects (Content Knowledge) - \$130
- Application fee to PDE - \$200
- Background checks - \$59.95
- **Total Cost - \$563.95**

But what if Teacher A wanted to have a certificate that covers grades 5 and 6? The individual would have to take the ETS Praxis 5/6 add-on assessment. This plan is often suggested by the early learning community as a solution to teacher shortages in grades 5/6 in place of PDE and the State Board realigning the instructional grade span for the certifications. The issue of grade span realignment is addressed in more detail later in my testimony.

Teacher A – Seeking Prek-4 Certification AND the 5/6 Certificate Add-on

- ETS Praxis Exam Prek-4 - \$131
- Application fee to PDE (for Prek-4) - \$200
- ETS Praxis Exams for 5/6 add-on - \$100 (must take two \$50 tests)
- Application fee to PDE (for 5/6 add-on) - \$200
- Background checks - \$59.95
- **Total Cost - \$690.95**

Teacher Candidate C – Seeking Career and Technical Intern Certification

A Career and Technical Intern Certificate is a temporary certificate (valid for three calendar years) issued by the Department that allows a certificate holder to work as a teacher in career and technical education programs while also attending a state-approved career and technical teacher preparation program at an institution of higher education. The requirements for a Career and Technical Intern Certificate are: Acceptable evidence of four years (8,000 hours) of wage-earning experience (or volunteer hours for Protective Services) in the occupation to be taught; Acceptance to a State-approved career and technical teacher preparation program at one of the approved universities; Passing scores on the appropriate occupational competency examination, or evaluation of credentials for occupations where examinations do not exist; Having been recommended for the Career and Technical Intern Certificate by the university at which they are enrolled or accepted; and meeting all requirements under the School Code.

- Occupational Competency Exam - \$415 (Temple)
- Credential Review - \$155 (Temple)
- Background check- \$59.95
- **Total Cost - \$629.95**

Teacher Candidate D – Seeking Career and Technical Instructional Certification

A Career and Technical Instructional Certificate (valid for eight service years) is issued by the Department on the recommendation of a university having a Pennsylvania-approved career and technical teacher preparation program. The applicant must complete 18 credit hours in an



approved program of career and technical teacher education (which can only be completed at Penn State, Temple, IUP, or Point Park).

- Per credit hour/PA Resident - \$1105 (Temple) x 18 credits = \$19,890
- ETS Praxis Core Reading Exam - \$90
- ETS Praxis Core Writing Exam - \$90
- Application fee to PDE - \$200
- Background check- \$59.95
- **Total Cost - \$20,329.95**

All of the candidates in these examples will pay another \$200 in application fees within 6-8 years to be eligible for their Instructional II certificate.

In general, once teachers achieve their permanent Instructional II certificate, they don't want to pay for any more exams or application fees, nor do they want to commit the time to prepare and sit for more certification exams. We should not keep asking our educators to spend their personal money and more of their personal time to remedy the deficiencies in Pennsylvania's certification system or to help administrators fill vacancies and shortages that remain prevalent in public schools.

Half of a candidate's \$200 application fee to the Department is intended to support the Professional Standards and Practices Commission (PSPC) in its administration of the EDA. If the Department is inadequately funded to support the work of the PSPC, then the General Assembly should address this concern as part of the state budget process.<sup>4</sup> The application fee to the Department was increased from \$125 to \$200 in late 2016. Previously, \$100 was the standard application fee, and \$25 was added to help finance the PSPC efforts to clear a backlog of misconduct petitions. The portion of the fee dedicated to the PSPC was increased by 300 percent, resulting in a total application fee that is too high. Moreover, this fee is inconsistent with what educators in neighboring states are expending for their certifications.

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<sup>4</sup> 22 Pa Code § 233.102 outlines the purpose of the PSPC: "The body charged with the oversight and enforcement of the educator discipline system, the primary goal of the Commission is to ensure the health, safety and welfare of students and other individuals in schools in this Commonwealth while facilitating the fair, efficient and transparent adjudication of complaints against educators."

*Recommendation 3: Improve pathways to Certification for various candidates*

When an educator decides to leave the profession, they have the option of placing their certification in a lockbox, of sorts, referred to as voluntary inactive status. This effectively stops the clock on the educator's Act 48 continuing professional education (CPE) requirement. For this privilege, educators have to pay the Department \$75. When an educator wants to remove their certificate from voluntary inactive status, these individuals must complete 30 CPE hours and pay the Department another \$75.

Greater efficiency can be incorporated into this process, especially given the educator shortage. PSEA's members don't think it makes sense for certified educators to have to complete 30 CPE hours *before* they can apply to the Department to remove their certificate from voluntary inactive status. Pennsylvania should allow these certificated educators to return to classrooms and perform their 30 CPE hours prospectively through school entities' in-service days over a two-year period. This will give these educators returning to the field plenty of time to complete their 30 hours, as well as get started on their next Act 48 requirement. Our members would also recommend relieving some of the financial burden by eliminating the fee to *place* a certificate in voluntary inactive status.

*Recommendation 4: Address Certification Grade Spans*

Over the years, many school administrators have suggested revising the grade spans for early childhood and middle certificates and either adding the old K-6 certificate to the slate of options or, alternatively, eliminating the separate early childhood and middle certificates and returning altogether to the K-6 certificate. PSEA can see the logic of their reasoning. After all, the need for a K-6 elementary certificate is largely driven by the realities of the structure of schools in Pennsylvania and the need to have teachers with certificates that make deployment throughout the school more viable. PSEA even went as far as drafting House Bill 1386 for then-Rep. Kristin Phillips-Hill in the 2017-2018 legislative session to address the issue.

The data supports the anecdotal evidence provided by school administrators. According to the Department's Act 82 certification data, in 2022-2023 there were 390 in-state certificates issued in the four academic areas (math, science, social studies, and English) for grades 4-8. There were

also an additional 149 grade 5-6 in-state certificates issued, and 13 grade 5-6 add-on certificates. Meanwhile there were 1,263 preK-4 in-state certificates issued. Less than half of new early “childhood and middle grade certificate-holders can provide classroom instruction in grades 5 and 6.

With this said, I think it’s equally important that we acknowledge some additional truths, as well.

- The grouping of the current grade levels for early childhood and middle certificates was done to more closely align professional expertise with children’s brain development.
- The regulatory changes that split the elementary certificate into early childhood and middle grades helped to create the pipeline of certified educators for the Pre-K Counts and Keystone 4-Star childcare programs. Research has historically demonstrated that pre-kindergarten programs with teachers that have bachelor’s degrees and specialized training in early childhood education have better outcomes for kids.

All of these things can be true at the same time. PSEA supports high-quality pre-kindergarten programs taught by certified educators. They are among our members. That said, we believe the certificate grade spans must be revised.

PSEA would support either of the following solutions:

1. Reinststitute the K-6 instructional certification while maintaining the early childhood, middle and secondary instructional certificates; or
2. Revise the early childhood and secondary instructional certificates by extending the preK-4 certification to 5<sup>th</sup> grade and lower the secondary instructional certification to grade 6 (as opposed to grades 7-12).

### *Conclusion*

In closing, I believe that we can address some of the inefficiencies in our certification system if we examine policy proposals through the lens of respect for educators as professionals and with the goal of ensuring schools are staffed with certified personnel to meet student needs. PSEA stands ready to provide feedback on ideas and we look forward to partnering with this Committee to make positive change for public education across the commonwealth. Thank you

for your consideration of PSEA’s testimony today. I will be happy to answer any of your questions.



**Written testimony of Teach Plus PA before the House Education Committee  
Tuesday, February 25, 2025  
Harrisburg, PA**

Chairman Schweyer, Chairman Cutler, and Esteemed Education Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on behalf of Teach Plus for today's hearing on teacher certification in Pennsylvania. We are committed to ensuring that every student has access to high-quality, well-prepared teachers who can address their diverse needs and foster an environment where all students can thrive. Our mission is to advance educational equity and excellence, and we believe that a critical part of this mission is supporting and empowering teachers through sound policies related to certification.

### **The Current Teacher Certification Landscape and the Need for Reform**

Research consistently shows that a highly qualified, adequately staffed, and diverse teacher workforce is essential for a thriving educational system and economy. Teacher quality is the most important in-school factor influencing student achievement and is linked to long-term outcomes such as graduation rates, college attendance, and future earnings. Internationally, high-performing education systems – such as Finland – recruit teacher candidates from among their best students, ensuring teachers have deep subject-matter expertise. Additionally, research confirms that teachers of color significantly improve educational outcomes for all students, especially for students of color.

Teacher shortages and turnover, however, pose significant challenges that negatively affect student achievement and school climate. Unfortunately, Pennsylvania is facing a teacher shortage crisis, compounded by declining certification rates. Since 2010, the number of teachers certified annually in Pennsylvania has dropped from 21,000 per year to just 7,500. Nationally, teacher preparation program enrollment has declined, but Pennsylvania's drop of over two-thirds in the past decade is twice as steep as the national average. We must act swiftly to reverse this trend and ensure a sustainable, diverse, and well-prepared teaching workforce.

### **Teacher Certification Assessments**

Research on licensure testing presents a mixed picture. While licensure tests and GPA are generally strong predictors of teacher effectiveness, they are not without limitations. Some studies have found that candidates who score below the cutoff on licensure tests can still be highly effective in the classroom. Furthermore, traditional licensure tests often fail to assess the full range of skills necessary for effective teaching, including classroom management. Notably, research indicates that the best predictor of a new teacher's success and likelihood to stay in the classroom is how quickly they learn to manage student behavior.

In Pennsylvania, we still rely heavily on traditional licensure tests, which can be costly and present barriers to entry for many aspiring teachers. While they correlate with teacher

effectiveness in some areas, they can also be a barrier to entry for teachers of color and lower-income candidates. A recent study in Connecticut found that failing the Praxis II subject-matter test pushed out many effective candidates, particularly those seeking positions in STEM and special education. This research highlights how licensure tests can act as barriers, especially for teachers of color.<sup>1</sup>

The experience of other states provides valuable insight into potential reforms. For example, states like Massachusetts and Mississippi have piloted performance-based licensure systems, which have shown promise in predicting teachers' contributions to student achievement better than traditional tests. Performance-based assessments could provide a more comprehensive view of a candidate's readiness for the classroom. Many states are exploring alternatives to traditional licensure testing to enhance teacher preparation and diversity. For example, New Mexico and Wisconsin require fewer subject-specific tests, while California and Delaware allow options like portfolios, high GPA requirements, or performance assessments to meet licensure standards.

Despite the potential benefits of these alternatives, they come with challenges. Alternative certification pathways can be resource-intensive, difficult to implement consistently, and yield mixed results. For instance, portfolios require significant time and oversight, and their reliability in assessing the full range of necessary content knowledge and pedagogical skills remains uncertain. While states like Illinois and Washington have loosened licensure test requirements with positive outcomes, data from Texas—where testing requirements were temporarily waived for teacher interns—showed that candidates who had not passed their content tests were less likely to achieve certification and performed at lower levels in the classroom. When considering alternatives, it is important to focus on eliminating unnecessary barriers while not lowering the bar to become a teacher.

### **Teacher Certification Costs**

For many prospective teachers, the various application fees and testing costs required for certification constitute a stark financial obstacle. For example, a candidate wishing to be a middle school English Language Arts teacher can expect to face out-of-pocket costs for Praxis exams, study guide materials including practice tests, application fees, and background checks to result in over \$650 in upfront costs. These costs assume that the candidate will pass their Praxis content exams on their first attempt and are additional to the tens of thousands of dollars spent on their four-year baccalaureate teacher preparation program.

Moreover, the aforementioned certification and testing costs increase significantly for students who require multiple attempts at the Praxis content exams. According to an analysis of [Pennsylvania pass-rate data from Praxis](#), only 59% of candidates who attempted the PA Grades 4-8 Core: Math and Science Subtest passed on their first attempt. This figure drops significantly when considering candidates of color; only 27% of Black or African American candidates passed the same exam on their first attempt.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Orellana, A., & Winters, M. A. (2023). *Licensure tests and teacher supply*. Boston University's Wheelock Educational Policy Center.

<sup>2</sup> Data extracted from the 2023-24 school year ETS Results (Excel) provided by the [Pennsylvania Department of Education](#)

Low first-attempt pass rates are concerning not just because multiple attempts cost candidates money, uncertainty, and delays in securing a teaching job, but because many who fail never make another attempt, as new national [data from the NCTQ reveals](#). Of all test takers who fail on their first attempt, nearly a quarter (22%) do not retake the test. This number is even higher (30%) for candidates of color.

## **Proposed Policy Solutions to Improve Teacher Certification**

To improve outcomes for students and teacher retention, it is important to not lower the bar to becoming a teacher but instead limit any barriers that are not evidence-based and can hold people back from pursuing a teacher career. To address these challenges and help build a more effective and representative teacher workforce, we propose the following policy solutions:

1. **Waive the cost of certification and application fees, including testing fees for those who take the Praxis Content exams multiple times:** The costs associated with certification and application fees can be a significant barrier, particularly for those from low-income backgrounds. Waiving these fees would reduce financial barriers to entry and help ensure that talented candidates—especially those from historically underrepresented communities—are not excluded from the profession. This policy would also address the issue of retesting costs, which disproportionately affect candidates of color and those already facing financial hardships. Removing these cost barriers will not only allow teachers a financial reprieve from the challenges faced with the cost of entry into the profession but will also incentivize teacher candidates to achieve success on their licensure exams.
2. **In place of a blanket waiver of cost, provide targeted scholarship opportunities for low-income teacher candidates.** In place of a blanket fee waiver, we recommend targeted scholarships for low-income teacher candidates. This more direct approach would relieve the economic pressures of entering the teaching profession for those who can demonstrate financial need. We could streamline this process by using Pell Grant or tax return data to identify the candidates most in need of assistance.
3. **Replace the 3.0 GPA Requirement with a Major-Specific or Cohort GPA Requirement.** The current general GPA requirement of 3.0 unnecessarily excludes qualified candidates who excel in their field of study but do not meet the overall GPA threshold. We propose replacing this with a major-specific GPA requirement, better aligning certification standards with the skills necessary for success in the classroom. Alternatively, we could implement a cohort-based GPA requirement, allowing a class or cohort to meet the 3.0 threshold while allowing individual candidates to fall below or above the requirement.

4. **Establish a commission to study evidence-based alternatives:** By establishing a commission to explore evidence-based alternatives to traditional certification tests. This commission would assess the effectiveness of using classroom performance measures—such as observations, student work assessments, and surveys—as substitutes for standardized tests. The commission could gather data on whether performance-based certification better predicts teacher success, retention, and diversity.
  
5. **Provide an alternative option for the teacher content test, such as a content-based portfolio or high GPA in the subject area:** Licensure tests, while predictive of certain teacher qualities, are not always the best or only measure of effectiveness. We recommend creating alternative pathways for teacher candidates, such as content-based portfolios or high GPAs in the subject area. For example, some states like New Mexico and Colorado allow candidates to substitute portfolios or high grades in lieu of traditional licensure tests. This could provide a more holistic and flexible approach to assessing teacher readiness and could encourage a more diverse group of candidates to enter the profession.
  
6. **Extend Student Teaching Experience:** Consider extending the student teaching experience from 12 weeks to a full school year. Research shows that extended classroom experience significantly improves teacher retention and effectiveness. The [National Center for Teacher Residencies](#) found that 86% of teachers graduating from year-long residency programs stayed in the classroom for at least three years. Extending the student teaching experience would better prepare teachers and reduce turnover rates, benefiting students and schools across Pennsylvania.
  
7. **If keeping the content test, provide free study materials:** For those who choose to take licensure tests, we recommend providing free access to high-quality study materials. The financial burden of test preparation, especially for low-income candidates, can create barriers to success. Providing free study resources will help level the playing field, ensuring that all candidates have the opportunity to perform well on certification exams.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, we urge the committee to consider the proposed policy solutions, which will reduce barriers to entry, increase the diversity of the teacher workforce, and ensure that our teacher certification process is fair, equitable, and aligned with the needs of our students. We believe these reforms will not only help address the teacher shortage but also contribute to better student outcomes, particularly for students of color and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to continuing the conversation and working together to improve teacher certification and educational outcomes for all students in Pennsylvania.



Tuesday, February 25, 2025  
Pennsylvania House Education Committee  
Informational Meeting  
515 Irvis Office Building  
Commonwealth Ave, Harrisburg, PA 17125

John Pulver, Pennsylvania Association of Career and Technical Administrators (PACTA)  
Prepared Testimony

First, thank you Chair Schweyer and Chair Cutler for the opportunity to speak to the House Education Committee today on the critical issues facing career and technical education (CTE) teacher certification in Pennsylvania. We appreciate your attention to this matter and are eager to discuss thoughtful and comprehensive solutions to improve CTE across our Commonwealth and keep our workforce strong.

We at the Pennsylvania Association of Career and Technical Administrators (PACTA) are guided by the belief that all citizens have the right to quality, affordable, and accessible career and technical education. Interest in CTE programs has increased in recent years as students pursue alternative pathways to their careers, underscoring the importance of high quality CTE teachers. This demand, paired with an unpredictable economy, makes it more critical than ever that every student has access to the skills they want or need to be competitive in the hiring market and get a good-paying job. However, as we all know, Pennsylvania is facing a historic teacher shortage and the field of CTE is no exception. The current CTE teacher certification process places an additional burden on the existing challenge of recruiting and retaining CTE talent. Unfortunately, we are seeing CTE Programs are closing across the state due to a lack of teachers. Pennsylvania needs to increase the number of CTE instructional certifications over the next three to five years to substantially reduce the shortage of teachers.

The spirit of career and technical education is to make learning and professional skills development more accessible, and the irony of the inaccessibility of the certification process should not be lost on this committee. We have working professionals in critical fields—from hospitality workers to mechanics—who are eager to share their knowledge with the next generation but are asked to comply with ill-defined, burdensome, and costly requirements to do so. In asking these professionals to become educators, we are asking them to invest their own time and resources, including time off from their current careers, to become certified and maintain that certification. It is not a sacrifice that many can make.

PACTA's strategic plan includes specific points to address these issues—from clarifying and standardizing certification practices across CTE programs to promoting professional growth opportunities for members—but we need support from the legislature to do more.

We are working to increase the number of CTE programs that meet State Board of Education requirements, including the acceptance of industry certifications or other recognition in lieu of a more traditional skills assessment. We are partnering with other education associations,

workforce development associations, business and industry associations, and governmental agencies to market CTE, identify the highest-priority career tracks, create a more diverse and highly skilled workforce, and engage in legislative advocacy.

The key to all our efforts is the engagement of working professionals in the process, ensuring fair and comprehensive skills assessment frameworks and that our programs and priorities reflect the needs of industry.

As we work to expand, diversify, and strengthen the CTE workforce, the implementation of a newer and more responsive CTE program in Pennsylvania gives us the opportunity to improve the teacher certification process. PACTA's legislative priorities for improving the CTE certification process include:

Tuition Coverage for CTE Intern Certification Credits: As educators pursue CTE certifications, unpaid internships can create extreme hardships and force quality educators out of the profession. The legislature should provide funding to cover the cost of the required 18 credits, making it easier for aspiring CTE educators to enter the profession.

Policy Changes to Support Certification: We want to encourage the best technicians to become teachers. We need to recognize industry credentials as part of the CTE certification process and replace the outdated Occupational Competency Assessment (OCA) requirement, allowing a more diverse range of professionals to enter the CTE teaching profession.

Reimbursement Increase for Continuing Education and Training: We need to increase reimbursement rates for instructional hours so educators can pursue professional development. With the demand for specialized instruction, we must do everything possible to ensure we have highly skilled educators in our training centers.

Additionally, we need more programs and centers. The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) funds only 3 CTE Professional Development Centers in the state that are approved to grant CTE teaching certifications (Temple, PSU, and IUP). Recently Point Park University was also approved to issue only CTE instructional I Certifications, but it does not receive PDE funding.

There is so much untapped expertise in the Pennsylvania workforce. As the changing economy pushes people to pursue non-traditional career paths or highly specialized skills programs, we should be prioritizing investment in CTE to prepare our students for in-demand jobs, empower our educators to succeed, and ensure our economy remains strong and competitive.

We thank you for your support of career and technical education and look forward to working with you to continue to open new career pathways and make career and technical education in Pennsylvania more accessible.



## CENTER FOR BLACK EDUCATOR DEVELOPMENT

Testimonial Letter to the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, House Democratic Education Committee  
Hon. Peter Schweyer, Majority Chair  
Tuesday, February 25, 2025

Thank you Honorable Peter Schweyer, Majority Chair for your ongoing commitment to education equity for all school-age children throughout the State of Pennsylvania. My name is Sharif EL-Mekki, Founder/CEO at the Center for Black Educator Development (*the Center*), a Philadelphia-based, national non-profit organization with a mission to ensure all students have access to a quality – regardless of race and other geodemographic variables. Today, I'm testifying to address barriers in teacher certification.

In efforts to secure education equity for all students, at the Center, through our teaching pathways (including Teaching Academy which provides Career and Technical Education for high schools students interested in the teaching profession), professional learning opportunities, and policy and advocacy, we're *Rebuilding the National Black Teacher Pipeline*. As applied policy research shows, when Black students have Black teachers they have a higher probability of high school completion, college and/or career success, better attendance, higher self-esteem and better social outcomes. As it turns out, diversity benefits, and adds to, all teachers and students. What we know to be true: representation in classrooms, and in schools, matter. Currently, barriers in teacher certification directly impact the education workforce, and with those limitations, we decrease the probability of diversifying a sector desperate for increased representation.

As a lifelong educator and student advocate, I am cemented in seeing a diverse workforce that invites and welcomes educators of all backgrounds to the classroom. And because *Research for Action* found between 2000-2020 Philadelphia lost 1,200 Black teachers, we cannot afford to lose – and, or to not – center the possibilities of increasing teacher diversity across both race and gender. We join our colleagues across the state and the nation in asking the State of Pennsylvania to:

### **Expand and Strengthen the Teacher Certification Pipeline from Early Education**

- Implement a program where Pennsylvania begins fostering teacher candidates earlier, potentially starting with teaching fellow programs in high school and integrating PRAXIS preparation into high school. This would allow students to start the certification process early and enter college with a clear pathway toward certification, minimizing barriers to entry. At the Center, we're advocating for this by providing Teaching Academy to high school students interested in earning CTE credits and obtaining classroom tools to inform their potential careers as future educators.

### **Increase College and University Responsibility for Teacher Certification**

- Hold universities accountable for ensuring that all graduates pursuing a teaching career are fully certified by the time they graduate. This could include greater investment in certification support programs, mentorship, and career services that help students navigate the complex teacher certification process and transition from college to classroom seamlessly.

### **Introduce a Comprehensive Loan Forgiveness and Financial Support Program**

- Implement a state-level loan forgiveness program which would include a mandatory criteria for upfront scholarships for future educators, particularly those in high-need areas or who are underrepresented in the teaching profession. Alongside this, ensure that financial support is available to cover the costs of certification exams, continuing education, and related expenses to help alleviate the financial burdens on teacher candidates. The Center's Teacher Pipeline Fellowship provides fellows with up to \$5,000 per year in last dollar scholarships, certification costs, professional support, and up to \$20,000 in stipends at the start of their fifth-year of teaching. These types of loan forgiveness and fiscal support opportunities could be made available to all future teachers across the State of Pennsylvania.

### **Reconsider GPA and Admissions Requirements to Promote Inclusivity**

- Reevaluate the current GPA requirements for entry into teacher preparation programs and teacher certification exams. By reconsidering strict GPA thresholds, we can provide opportunities for talented and passionate individuals who may have faced challenges earlier in their academic careers but possess the potential to be effective educators. Reconsidering GPA and admissions requirements is essential for fostering a more inclusive and diverse teacher workforce. As someone who would have been excluded based on my own GPA, I know firsthand that academic performance doesn't always reflect the true potential of an educator, especially when it comes to those committed to making a meaningful difference in the lives of students from historically underrepresented communities. Today, as a U.S. Department of Education Principal Ambassador Fellow under the Obama administration and the principal of Mastery Charter Shoemaker – where, under my leadership, we earned the prestigious EPIC award for three consecutive years as one of the top three schools in the country for accelerating student achievement – I am living proof of what is possible for all.

In conclusion, addressing the barriers to teacher certification is essential for building a more equitable and effective education system in Pennsylvania. By expanding the pipeline early, supporting our universities, offering financial relief, and reconsidering rigid requirements, we can ensure that every aspiring educator—regardless of their background—has the opportunity to thrive. It is critical that we invest in the future of education to create a more diverse and skilled teacher workforce that reflects the needs of our students. I urge you to take bold action to make these changes a reality for Pennsylvania's educators and students. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Thank you for your attention and consideration,



Sharif El-Mekki  
Founder/CEO  
Center for Black Educator Development