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Information

Professional Services Committee

Options for the Review of Elementary Subject Matter Programs

Executive Summary: At its April 2004 meeting, the Commission directed staff to review program approval options for Elementary Subject Matter Preparation Programs. An open meeting was held with stakeholders to discuss options for the review and approval of Elementary Subject Matter Preparation Programs. This item summarizes the meeting held with stakeholders in July 2004.

Recommended Action: None. This is an information item and staff is seeking direction about which issues to bring back for Commission action.

Presenter: Dr. Michael McKibbin, Consultant, Professional Services Division.

Options for the Review of Elementary Subject Matter Programs

Introduction

At the April 2004 Commission meeting, a Study Session was held regarding the approval of subject matter programs in light of the requirements of California's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) state plan. After a discussion of the issues, the Commission directed staff to review the program approval options for elementary subject matter preparation programs and to return with a recommendation regarding approval of these programs.

Background

At its August 2003 meeting, the Commission took action to align the certification process to the California State Board of Education's state plan and the requirements of the federal NCLB plan. As a result, the Commission requires all "new" teachers at the elementary school level to establish subject matter competence by passing a Commission-approved subject matter test. This test is currently the California Subject Examination for Teachers (CSET).

Following a discussion at the April Study Session regarding the purpose and role of elementary subject matter programs within the NCLB context, the Commission directed staff to further examine alternate methods of reviewing and approving elementary subject matter programs.

On July 1, 2004, Commission staff held an open meeting to discuss this issue. Nineteen persons attended the meeting, including representation from the University of California, California State University, the California Community Colleges, private and independent colleges and universities, and representatives of the K-12 community. Eight other individuals submitted written comments to Commission staff.

The following issues were discussed at the meeting:

- The value of a Commission review of elementary subject matter preparation programs.
- Recognition for teacher candidates who complete the elementary subject matter preparation program in addition to successfully passing the required subject matter examination.
- Possibilities for "streamlining" the approval process while still maintaining critical program standards, including alignment to the K-12 Student Academic Content Standards, as well as the instructional integrity of the program.

- Renaming the designated approval status of the elementary subject matter preparation programs completing the review process from this time forward.

Discussion

- (1) The value of Commission program review: Some program sponsors commented that program enrollment had already begun to drop in some elementary subject matter preparation programs as a result of eliminating the option of completing an approved elementary subject matter program as a means of meeting the subject matter competence requirement. Nevertheless, there was general agreement on the value of the review process in assuring that these programs provide preparation aligned with the K-12 curriculum, and in helping teacher candidates prepare for the required subject matter exam. In addition, program sponsors noted that the review process also helps subject matter faculty and school of education faculty work with the K-12 community in designing elementary subject matter programs.
- (2) Recognition of teacher candidates who complete elementary subject matter preparation programs in addition to the CSET: Both program sponsors and K-12 participants felt that the additional level of effort and preparation demonstrated by teacher candidates who complete an elementary subject matter preparation program in addition to the CSET exam should be recognized or affirmed in a meaningful way. K-12 school administrators in particular wanted to know which candidates had completed undergraduate programs aligned with the K-12 Student Academic Content Standards. Given the significant number of applications received by districts for teaching positions, such an identification printed on the candidate's credential would provide for ease of reference to distinguish these well-prepared candidates. A significant issue relating to implementing the suggested addition to the candidate's credential, however, is that credential documents serve as authorizations to teach or perform specified school services, and are not transcripts of programs or coursework completed.
- (3) "Streamlining" the current review process: The majority of attendees who expressed an opinion favored maintenance of the current standards and review process.
- (4) Renaming the designated status of the elementary subject matter preparation programs completing the review process from this time forward: Attendees suggested changing the designation of elementary subject matter preparation programs that complete the review process from "Commission-approved programs" since the completion of an approved program no longer waives the subject matter exam, and this designation could be confusing to candidates. Attendees suggested the designation of "Commission-Recognized Elementary Subject Matter Preparation Program." While this designation addresses the potential confusion by using "Recognized" in place of "Approved," it does not clearly convey that the program's alignment to the K-12 Student Academic Content Standards has been confirmed. An alternative designation could be "Standards-aligned Elementary Subject Matter Preparation Program," to reflect the emphasis that these programs place on alignment with the K-12 Student Academic Content Standards.