Proposed Mastery-Based Route to Certification: Alternative Authorization for Content Specialists

Introduction

Based upon the desire of multiple stakeholders to develop a more flexible, mastery-based route to certification, and the desire of the Idaho Educator Pipeline Workgroup to maintain rigor and established standards for effective teaching, proposed here is a new alternative route to certification for Content Specialists. It is made up of three distinct phases: 1) Establishing proof of content area knowledge and developing an individualized learning plan; 2) Access to a Pedagogy “Boot Camp”, offered as a hybrid program to include online modules addressing pedagogy/ application of that pedagogical content, and membership in a regional cohort, and; 3) Online performance assessments to determine mastery of pedagogy, ongoing mentor support, and completion of Common Summative Assessment (required of all candidates seeking Idaho certification).

This plan accommodates candidates from a variety of backgrounds, allowing them to enter the program at various points, and exit at any point that mastery can be established.

Overview of the Proposed Program

Phase One: Proof of Content Knowledge and Individualized Learning Plans

A Board-approved assessment of content knowledge will be established as a point for entry. Following this, the appropriate content knowledge test for teachers (Praxis II) will be taken. If the Praxis assessment is passed, no further proof of content knowledge is necessary to demonstrate mastery. If not passed, content-area coursework will be included in the individual pathway plan, allowing candidates to accrue knowledge directly related to their demonstrated gaps in content knowledge. In the event that a candidate holds an advanced degree in the content area, he/she may go directly to Phase Two without any testing.

Phase Two: Pedagogy Boot Camp, Professional Learning Community and Support

Regional Cohorts will be opened as needed and will include quarterly, face-to-face seminars on Saturdays. Five self-paced, online pedagogy modules will be offered for candidates to take at their own pace based on their individual needs. Alternatively, the modules can also be offered on a rotating cycle, with a weekly, virtual “class” convening through either existing institutions, entities, or regional PLCs for candidates to engage in moderated discussions on the application of pedagogical content and problems of practice. During these sessions, discussion and learning will center on job-embedded projects, tailored to the candidate’s daily teaching assignment.
Modules will specifically focus on “big ideas” in teaching, aligned to the Framework for Teaching Clusters and the InTASC Standards for teaching. While most aspects of the teaching clusters apply to all teaching situations (e.g. deep conceptual understanding, the use of precise academic language, and the skills of argumentation), specific versions of these modules for literacy and mathematics will translate the generic language of the practices, where appropriate, into content-specific language to guide teachers. This will satisfy the state specific requirement for ELA, literacy, and mathematics instruction.

Additionally, to better align with College and Career Ready guidelines for teaching, the modules will encourage teachers to develop the analytic habits of mind that must be instilled in students. Candidates will analyze how to adapt their lessons to the specific needs and strengths of each classroom. For example, instead of engaging in a general alignment exercise that has teachers stating how their lesson outcomes are aligned to standards, the modules and assessments will examine how teachers actually model and use academic language to explain concepts in the classroom.

Online modules will be focused around model lessons, and organized around the specific “teaching cluster” being studied deeply within that unit; but will also include full lessons that best illustrate the how multiple teaching clusters (detailed in the other modules) work together around a single lesson. This “spiraling” of curriculum will allow candidates to have multiple opportunities to see key practices, reinforcing their learning and awareness with every module. A variety of resources will be available to supplement each module, allowing the candidates control of targeted deeper learning.

Phase Three: Mentoring and Performance Assessment

At whatever point candidates feel confident in implementing the strategies implicit in each module, they will have the ability to get virtual mentoring or face-to-face coaching on their actual implementation of a lesson in preparation for the performance assessment. Any of the five assessments may be taken at any time.

Assessments will require candidates to upload products of their practice for external review and scoring. A trained and certified group of scorers will review the work anonymously to determine a “pass” or “no pass” score. Unsuccessful attempts will be returned to candidates with appropriate feedback.

Passing each of the five assessments associated with the five teaching clusters will serve as proof of pedagogy and meet the requirements of the Idaho Core Teaching Standards.

At this point candidates will be evaluated by a trained supervisor in order to complete the Common Summative Assessment required of all teacher candidates. This assessment serves as proof of performance, and qualifies the candidate to move from interim certification to full standard certification.
Advantages of the Proposed Alternative Route

The pathway proposed offers many advantages for those serving in the role of “teacher of record” while working toward certification. The two current routes are through the American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence (ABCTE) and the Alternative Authorization - Content Specialist route to Certification in partnership with approved Idaho educator preparation programs. The advantages of the proposed program over ABCTE are most obvious – unlike ABCTE this route provides structured support, application of content, and performance-based measures of competence. However, this route also offers advantages over coursework-based routes currently being implemented through Idaho preparation programs. For example:

- Modules will be offered on an ongoing, rotating basis, allowing candidates to move in and out of the curriculum according to their own needs, unbound by external time constraints such as semester schedules.
- Each of the five pedagogy modules will be designed to be self-paced; but generally will be implemented within a 6-week period, in combination with access to a regional professional learning community and structured mentoring. Each module will be followed by a two-week period to provide candidates time to gather evidence to complete the final assessments.
- All five assessments will be available to candidates at all times. In the rare case that a candidate has developed strong pedagogy prior to entering the teaching field (e.g. a long-time classroom paraprofessional), it would be possible to complete all five performance assessments within months.
- For candidates embracing the full program and all program supports, all five modules and assessments are ultimately designed to be completed within a period of 40 weeks, fully covering the Idaho Core Teaching Standards and aligned to the Framework for Teaching to ensure candidate success on the Common Summative Assessment (required of all Idaho teachers being recommended for certification). However, if a new teacher is overwhelmed at first (which is often the case), because the interim certificate allows for a three-year preparation period, candidates may elect to skip modules and re-engage at a time that allows that candidate to be most effective and successful.
- In the event that an LEA has highly effective master teachers who have the time and opportunity to provide direct guidance to new teachers, modules may be skipped entirely in place of this one-on-one mentorship, with each of the five assessments available to be taken at any time.
- Content is offered completely online, professional learning communities will be established regionally, and mentor support will be available virtually to better serve the needs of Idaho’s rural districts.
Each of the five pedagogy modules will incorporate a spiraled design around clusters of critical pedagogy. Using such a model, regardless of which unit a candidate starts with, they are exposed to multiple aspects of best teaching practice that are reinforced over and over throughout all five modules.

In compliance with the requirements for certification stated in IDAPA 08.02.02.018 (for teachers prepared through either traditional and non-traditional pathways), candidates would only be granted certification once they had evidence of proof of content, proof of pedagogy, and proof of performance. A description of each of the three phases of this proposed pathway and how it meets these requirements is contained in Table 1. Detailed information on how candidates would enter and exit the program is contained in Table 2. Table 3 illustrates the alignment between this program, the Idaho Core Teaching Standards, and the Framework for Teaching.