# Agenda Item: E

## Date: February 2, 2023

## Title: First Review of Arlington County Public Schools Alternate Route to Licensure for Certain Endorsements Pursuant to House Bill 2486 of the 2019 Virginia General Assembly

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## Presenter: Joan B. Johnson, Assistant Superintendent of Teacher Education and Licensure

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## Purpose of Presentation:

Action required by state or federal law or regulation.

## Executive Summary

On November 14, 2019, the Virginia Board of Education (Board) approved proposed *Guidelines for Alternate Routes to Licensure in Response to House Bill 2486 of the 2019 Virginia General Assembly* (*Guidelines*). [HB2486 (2019)](https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?191+ful+CHAP0409) required, in part, the following:

The Board shall develop guidelines that establish a process to permit a school board or any organization sponsored by a school board to petition the Board for approval of an alternate route to licensure that may be used to meet the requirements for a provisional or renewable license or any endorsement. Any such alternate route may include alternatives to the regulatory requirements for teacher preparation, including alternative professional assessments and coursework. The petitioner may proffer or the Board may impose conditions in conjunction with the approval of such petition.

The *Guidelines* became effective on January 23, 2020, after the 30-day public comment period.

Pursuant to the *Guidelines*, Arlington County Public Schools (ACPS) submitted an application for an alternate route to licensure for their division. ACPS has hosted a [public Montessori program](https://www.apsva.us/early-childhood-prek/programs-and-services/montessori-program/) for 50 years. The program provides Montessori instruction for students from pre-K through eighth grade. In 2019, ACPS opened the first stand-alone public Montessori school in the Commonwealth, and it houses the county’s Montessori elementary program.

Primary Montessori classes are held at seven ACPS elementary schools, and the middle school Montessori program is housed at Gunston Middle School. The Montessori program is one of the most popular instructional choices within ACPS and boasts a robust number of student applicants to the program each year. In hopes of better supporting the sustainability and expansion of this successful program—and in order to more responsibly steward the resources of the district, school, and teachers—ACPS is seeking an alternate route to Virginia professional educator licensure for Montessori licensed teachers in early/primary education, elementary education, and middle school education.

Per the *Guidelines*, the Virginia Department of Education formed a panel of educational leaders to review ACPS’s application (Attachment A) to determine if all competencies of an educator preparation program were met. After careful review and thoughtful discussion, the panel requested additional information to support and strengthen the application (Attachment B).

This initiative supports the Board’s Comprehensive Plan to advance policies that increase the number of candidates entering the teaching profession and encourage and support the recruitment, development, and retention of well prepared and skilled teachers.

## Action Requested:

Action will be requested at a future meeting.

March 23, 2023

## Superintendent’s Recommendation

The Superintendent of Public Instruction recommends that the Board of Education receive for first review the recommendation of the department’s panel to approve Arlington County Public Schools Alternate Route to Licensure for Certain Endorsements Pursuant to House Bill 2486 as presented.

## Previous Review or Action:

No previous review or action.

## Background Information and Statutory Authority:

In addition to the completion of an approved teacher preparation program and application for a license through reciprocity, the Board of Education’s *Licensure Regulations for School Personnel* ([8VAC20-23](https://law.lis.virginia.gov/admincode/title8/agency20/chapter23/)) provide for the following alternate routes to licensure:

* Career Switcher Alternate Route for Career Professionals
* Provisional License Route for Individuals Employed by a Virginia Educational Agency
* Provisional Alternate Route to a Technical Professional License (Career and Technical Education) for Individuals Employed by a Virginia Educational Agency
* Alternate Route in Special Education (Provisional License)
* Alternate Programs at Institutions of Higher Education
* Experiential Learning Alternate Route to Licensure

On November 14, 2019, the Board approved the *Guidelines*. [HB2486 (2019)](https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?191+ful+CHAP0409) required, in part, the following:

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| § [**22.1-298.1**](http://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/22.1-298.1). Regulations governing licensure.  A. As used in this section:  "Alternate route to licensure" means a nontraditional route to teacher licensure available to individuals who meet the criteria specified in theguidelines developed pursuant to subsection M or regulations issued by the Board of Education.  …  M. The Board shall develop guidelines that establish a process to permit a school board or any organization sponsored by a school board to petition the Board for approval of an alternate route to licensure that may be used to meet the requirements for a provisional or renewable license or any endorsement. Any such alternate route may include alternatives to the regulatory requirements for teacher preparation, including alternative professional assessments and coursework. The petitioner may proffer or the Board may impose conditions in conjunction with the approval of such petition. |

The *Guidelines* became effective on January 23, 2020, after the 30-day public comment period. In the process of reviewing applications submitted pursuant to the *Guidelines*, members of the Board and Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) staff raised questions about the process set forth in the effective *Guidelines*. After consultation with the Office of the Attorney General, a minor technical revision to the *Guidelines* was approved in order to align the document with legal advice and preserve the Board’s final authority in deciding to approve alternate routes to licensure under § 22.1-298.1 N. The revised *Guidelines* became effective on December X 2022, after the 30-day public comment period.

The purpose of this alternate route to licensure is to ensure local school divisions have an opportunity to meet their unique needs in recruiting and retaining educators for their school communities. While each division may be different, the Board of Education determines the requirements of teacher licensure so that teachers across the Commonwealth are adequately prepared to meet the needs of students in every classroom, not just in certain divisions. This legislation allows for different routes to teacher preparation, but maintains the issuances of the same types of licenses and endorsements. In accordance with these *Guidelines*, school divisions are applying for approval to offer an alternate route to licensure for educator candidates to satisfy the requirements and competencies of the traditional approved teacher preparation program provided at institutions of higher education. Candidates who complete the school divisions’ Board approved alternate route under these *Guidelines* will be issued a current Virginia educator license with the same type of endorsements as other candidates who completed an approved teacher preparation program or other approved alternate route to licensure.

In November 2021, Arlington County Public Schools local school board submitted an application for program review and approval (Attachment A). The Office of Licensure and School Leadership coordinated the review of the proposed alternate route program. The panel consisted of a diverse group of K-12 educational leaders as well as a representative from an institution of higher education who works with teacher educator preparation programs. On January 24, 2022, the panel convened to review the application. Their collective expertise was focused on confirming that the ACPS proposed route met the competencies of the *Regulations Governing the Review and Approval of Education Programs in Virginia* and prepared teachers to ensure students (1) attain the knowledge, skills, experiences, and attributes to be successful in college and/or the workforce and to be “life ready” (Profile of a Virginia Graduate) and (2) develop the following competencies known as the “Five C’s.” After careful review and discussion, the panel responded to the ACPS school board and asked for additional information and documentation that supported Montessori’s alignment with methods of teaching content to support learners in achievement of Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Early Learning: Comprehensive Standards for Four-Year-Olds and the Virginia Standards of Learning in English, mathematics, history and social science, science. The additional items responsive to the request (Attachment B) were received and reviewed by the panel.

The panel determined that while the ACPS proposed route to licensure was compelling, there was a concern that the Montessori credential did not exclusively satisfy all of the competencies of an approved program. The panel recommended minor modifications in order to strengthen the proposed alternate route preparation program and satisfy all competencies of the approved program regulations. Below are the panel’s recommendations for program approval:

All candidates for the ACPS Montessori Alternate Pathway to Licensure Program will:

* Hold at minimum a bachelor’s degree from an accredited college or university;
* Hold a credential (for the level at which they are being hired to teach - Early/Primary PreK-3, Elementary Education PreK-6, or the Middle Education endorsements) that has been issued by the American Montessori Society (AMS), Association Montessori Internationale (AMI), or an institution accredited by the Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (MACTE,) which is recognized as an accreditor by the US Department of Education;
* Have successfully passed the required content Praxis assessments required by the state of Virginia for their specific endorsement; and
* Have completed statutory requirements

Having met the above conditions, ACPS may request a provisional teaching license on behalf of the applicant by submitting the division’s request indicating this is an applicant for an alternate route to licensure, individual’s application, official transcripts with degree conferral date, assessment reports, copy of the Montessori credential, confirmation of statutory requirements being met, and application fee.

For applicants pursuing an Early/Primary PreK-3 or Elementary Education PreK-6 endorsement, the Office of Licensure and School Leadership will review each application and issue a provisional teaching license, valid for a period not to exceed three years. Individuals who have not already completed the below undergraduate or graduate coursework from an accredited institution of higher education, will be cited for the deficiencies:

* methods in teaching elementary mathematics course (3 semester hours);
* methods in teaching elementary science course (3 semester hours);
* methods in teaching elementary history and social sciences course (3 semester hours);
* reading and writing (3 semester hours);
* and one year of full-time supervised classroom experience in the content, provided the teacher is assigned a mentor holding a valid license with an endorsement in the content area.
* If not already taken, individuals will need to pass the VCLA and Praxis Reading assessment within the provisional license period.

For applicants pursuing an endorsement in Middle Education, the Office of Licensure and School Leadership will review each application and issue a provisional teaching license, valid for a period not to exceed three years. Individuals who have not already completed the below undergraduate or graduate coursework from an accredited institution of higher education, will be cited for the deficiencies:

* language acquisition and reading development (3 semester hours);
* literacy in the content areas: (3 semester hours);
* and one year of full-time supervised experience in the content, provided the teacher is assigned a mentor holding a valid license with an endorsement in the content area.
* If not already taken, individuals will need to pass the VCLA assessment within the provisional license period.

Provisional license holders may be issued 10-year renewable licenses when all licensure requirements have been satisfied.

ACPS understands that the Board of Education’s approval of this program is limited to the ACPS school division. ACPS is committed to submitting annual reports as requested by the Department of Education. The approval period for this alternate route to licensure will end if the school board discontinues the sponsorship. The school board must notify the Virginia Board of Education immediately in writing of a program’s discontinuance, including information on the individuals who are in the process of completing the program and the plan and timeline on how the teachers will complete the alternate education preparation program.

There are currently 11 states that offer an alternate route to licensure for public educators who hold a Montessori credential. Of these 10 states, seven states have additional requirements for those individuals who hold Montessori credential, including assessments and/or professional studies coursework.

## Timetable for Further Review/Action:

It is anticipated that this item will come before the Board for final review on March 23, 2023. Following Board approval, ACPS will work with the Office of Licensure and School Leadership to submit applications for those individuals who complete this Board approved alternate route to licensure.

## Impact on Fiscal and Human Resources:

The administrative requirements for approving provisional licenses via this alternate route will be absorbed within existing resources at the Department of Education. The cost of the administration of the ACPS alternate route to licensure will be absorbed by ACPS.