# Agenda Item: K

## Date: April 20, 2023

## Title: First Review of Applications from Divisions Partnering with iteach to Provide an Alternate Route to Licensure and 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*, the following school divisions have applied for an alternate route to licensure partnering with iteachUS:

Bedford County Public Schools

Chesapeake City Public Schools

Chesterfield County Public Schools

Fairfax County Public Schools

Hampton City Public Schools

Botetourt County Public Schools

Charles City Public Schools

Essex County Public Schools

Greensville County Public Schools

Middlesex County Public Schools

Newport News City Public Schools

Powhatan County Public Schools

Prince George County Public Schools

Roanoke County Public Schools

Shenandoah County Public Schools

Arlington County Public Schools

Dinwiddie County Public Schools

Henry County Public Schools

Mathews County Public Schools

Sussex County Public Schools

Westmoreland County Public Schools

iteachUS is a competency-based preparation program for educators that combines the convenience of online learning with the support of face-to-face mentorship. It was founded as iteachTEXAS in 2003 to help talented people become teachers while avoiding the high costs and time commitments of traditional educator preparation programs. The success at preparing great educators, attributed to the fluid combination of highly effective personnel, focused pedagogical curricula, supportive classroom mentoring and outstanding service to school districts, on a large scale grew into iteachUS in 2007. The iteachVIRGINIA distance learning curriculum imparts adult learning principles to promote better engagement with specific content and overall course understanding. This philosophy aligns with the thought that for the distance learner, the tool of technology is transparent, as the learner maintains focus on the instructional content. iteachVIRGINIA is proposing to provide pedagogical and content courses using an approach which blends practical distance instruction via the internet and focused field-based experiences under the support and supervision of iteach program staff. The program is based on a model that iteachUS, the program’s parent organization, successfully piloted more than a decade ago.

## Action Requested:

Action will be requested at a future meeting.

June 15, 2023

## Superintendent’s Recommendation

The Superintendent recommends that the Board of Education receive for first review the recommendation of the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) panel to approve identified portions of the applications submitted by divisions partnering with iteach to provide an alternate route to licensure and endorsements pursuant to House Bill 2486 of the 2019 Virginia General Assembly, as detailed below.

## 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

Through the adoption of [HB2486 (2019),](https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?191+ful+CHAP0409) the General Assembly created a new, different alternate pathway to empower school divisions to directly address teacher recruitment issues in their local community. The law requires, 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* adopted by the Board became effective on January 23, 2020, after the 30-day public comment period. The Office of the Attorney General, in consultation with VDOE staff, recommended a minor technical revision to the *Guidelines.* The Board approved new *Guidelines*, which became effective on December 22, 2022, following a 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. This legislation allows for different routes to teacher preparation. In accordance with state law, school divisions are applying for approval to offer an alternate route to licensure for educator candidates to satisfy the requirements and competencies. 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.

Since June 2022, 22 local school boards have applied for program review and approval to partner with iteach to provide professional studies, content, and ensure assessments are passed. The Office of Licensure and School Leadership coordinated the review of the proposed alternate route program. The panel consisted of a representative from an institution of higher education who works with teacher educator preparation programs, a school division assistant superintendent for curriculum, and leadership from the VDOE. On February 27, 2023, the panel convened to review the applications. The panel determined that the professional studies courses being offered by iteach met the competencies of the *Approved Program Regulations* for secondary endorsements with a Praxis content assessment. Further review by VDOE content experts in language acquisition, reading and writing, elementary methods of teaching, middle school language and acquisition and reading development, and literacy, determined that while the iteach curriculum provided a good foundation, the required competencies in the methods of teaching in certain subjects, as well as additional professional studies coursework in language and literacy, for the Elementary Education endorsements and Middle School endorsements were not satisfied entirely. The [*Regulations Governing the Review and Approval of Education Programs in Virginia*](https://law.lis.virginia.gov/admincode/title8/agency20/chapter543/section120/) provide that individuals must satisfy:

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| [8VAC20-543-120](https://law.lis.virginia.gov/admincode/title8/agency20/chapter543/) ...Virginia's core academic areas of English, mathematics, history and social sciences, such as history, government, geography, and economics, or science and demonstrated the following competencies:  1. Methods.  a. Understanding of the needed knowledge, skills, dispositions, and processes 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, and computer technology;  b. Understanding of current research on the brain, its role in learning, and implications for instruction;  c. The ability to integrate English, mathematics, science, health, history and social sciences, art, music, drama, movement, and technology in learning experiences;  d. The use of differentiated instruction and flexible groupings to meet the needs of learners at different stages of development, abilities, and achievement;  e. The use of appropriate methods, including those in visual and performing arts, to help learners develop knowledge and basic skills, sustain intellectual curiosity, and problem-solve;  f. The ability to utilize effective classroom and behavior management skills through methods that build responsibility and self-discipline promote self-regulation, and maintain a positive learning environment;  g. The ability to modify and manage learning environments and experiences to meet the individual needs of children, including children with disabilities, gifted children, children who are English learners, and children with diverse cultural needs;  h. The ability to use formal and informal assessments to diagnose needs, plan and modify instruction, and record student progress;  i. A commitment to professional growth and development through reflection, collaboration, and continuous learning;  j. The ability to analyze, evaluate, and apply quantitative and qualitative research; and  k. Understanding of the Virginia Standards of Learning for Computer Technology and the ability to use technology as a tool for teaching, learning, research, and communication; and  l. The ability to adapt task and interactions to maximize language development, conceptual understanding, and skill competence within each child's zone of proximal development.   [8VAC20-543-130](https://law.lis.virginia.gov/admincode/title8/agency20/chapter543/section130/) The program in middle education 6-8 with at least one area of academic preparation shall ensure that the candidate has demonstrated the following competencies:  1. Methods.  a. Understanding of the required knowledge, skills, and processes to support learners in achievement of the Virginia Standards of Learning for grades 6-8;  b. The use of appropriate methods, including direct instruction and inquiry-based instructional methods, to help learners develop knowledge and skills, sustain intellectual curiosity, and solve problems;  c. The ability to plan and teach collaboratively to facilitate interdisciplinary learning;  d. The use of differentiated instruction and flexible groupings to meet the needs of preadolescents at different stages of development, abilities, and achievement;  e. The ability to utilize effective classroom and behavior management skills through methods that build responsibility and self-discipline and maintain a positive learning environment;  f. The ability to modify and manage learning environments and experiences to meet the individual needs of preadolescents, including children with disabilities, gifted children, and children who are English learners;  g. The ability to use formal and informal assessments to diagnose needs, plan and modify instruction, and record student progress;  h. A commitment to professional growth and development through reflection, collaboration, and continuous learning;  i. The ability to analyze, evaluate, apply, and conduct quantitative and qualitative research;  j. The ability to use technology as a tool for teaching, learning, research, and communication;  k. An understanding of how to apply a variety of school organizational structures, schedules, groupings, and classroom formats appropriately for middle level learners;  l. Skill in promoting the development of all students' abilities for academic achievement and continued learning; and  m. The ability to use reading in the content area strategies appropriate to text and student needs.   [8VAC20-543-90](https://law.lis.virginia.gov/admincode/title8/agency20/chapter543/section90/) 6. Language and Literacy.  a. Early/primary education preK-3 and elementary education preK-6 language acquisition and reading and writing. Skills listed for these endorsement areas represent the minimum competencies that a beginning teacher must be able to demonstrate. These skills are not intended to limit the scope of a beginning teacher's program. Additional knowledge and skills that add to a beginning teacher's competencies to deliver instruction and improve student achievement should be included as part of a quality learning experience.  (1) Language acquisition: Skills in this area shall be designed to impart a thorough understanding of the Virginia English Standards of Learning, as well as the complex nature of language acquisition as a precursor to literacy. Language acquisition shall follow the typical development of linguistic competence in the areas of phonetics, semantics, syntax, morphology, phonology, and pragmatics.  (2) Reading and writing: Skills in this area shall be designed to impart a thorough understanding of the Virginia English Standards of Learning, as well as the reciprocal nature of reading and writing. Reading shall include phonemic and other phonological awareness, concept of print, phonics, fluency, vocabulary development, and comprehension strategies. Writing shall include writing strategies and conventions as supporting the composing and written expression and usage and mechanics domains. Additional skills shall include proficiency in understanding the stages of spelling development, and the writing process, as well as the ability to foster appreciation of a variety of fiction and nonfiction text and independent reading.  b. Middle education - language acquisition and reading development and literacy in the content areas.  (1) Language acquisition and reading development: Skills in this area shall be designed to impart a thorough understanding of the complex nature of language acquisition and reading, to include phonemic and other phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary development, and comprehension strategies for adolescent learners. Additional skills shall include proficiency in writing strategies, as well as the ability to foster appreciation of a variety of fiction and nonfiction text and independent reading for adolescent learners.  (2) Literacy in the content areas: Skills in this area shall be designed to impart an understanding of vocabulary development and comprehension skills in areas of English, mathematics, science, history and social science, and other content areas. Strategies include teaching students how to ask effective questions, summarize and retell both verbally and in writing, and to listen effectively. Teaching strategies include literal, interpretive, critical, and evaluative comprehension, as well as the ability to foster appreciation of a variety of fiction and nonfiction text and independent reading for adolescent readers. |

It was determined additional support to address the methods of teaching mathematics, methods of teaching history and social sciences, and the methods of teaching science would need to be added to the alternate route so the required knowledge, skills, dispositions, and processes to support learners in achievement of Virginia's standards, specifically the Foundation Blocks for Early Learning: Comprehensive Standards for Four-Year-Olds and the Virginia Standards of Learning in English, mathematics, history and social science, and science, as well as the knowledge, skills, and processes to support learners in achievement of the Virginia Standards of Learning for grades 6-8, could be addressed.

Further, the Virginia Literacy Act (VLA), which was unanimously passed by the 2022 General Assembly, provides guidance to better prepare and support educators on evidence-based literacy instruction and science-based literacy instruction to help every child learn to read. The VLA allows for a more targeted effort to ensure students are meeting literacy benchmarks, but it also means our teachers will need to be adequately prepared to meet their literacy needs. The syllabi and matrix provided by iteach in each division application indicates the professional studies coursework of language acquisition and reading and writing for early/primary education, preK-3, and elementary preK-6 will be addressed in courses 5400 – Literacy, 21st Century Instruction, and Pedagogical Content Knowledge and 6005 – Critical Reading and Writing Instruction, however, not all the competency areas were addressed. Specifically, in addition to the Virginia English Standards of Learning not being addressed, content experts were concerned that language acquisition was not addressed, and phonemic or phonological awareness, concept of print, phonics, fluency, writing, spelling development, and fiction and nonfiction texts are not addressed. The matrix and syllabi also indicate the professional studies competencies for middle education – language acquisition and reading development and literacy in the content area – will be addressed by the same aforementioned courses. However, VDOE content experts were concerned that does not address how the competencies will be met to ensure the teacher has a thorough understanding not only the Virginia English Standards of Learning, but also the complex nature of language acquisition and reading, to include phonemic and other phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary development, and comprehension strategies for adolescent learners, as well as teaching strategies that include literal, interpretive, critical, and evaluative comprehension, as well as the ability to foster appreciation of a variety of fiction and nonfiction text and independent reading for adolescent readers.

As such, the panel recommends minor modifications to the identified portions of school division applications 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:

1. All candidates for the respective divisions’ Alternate Pathway to Licensure Program in partnership with iteachVIRGINA will:
   1. Be accepted into the iteachVIRGINIA program.
   2. Have successfully passed the required content Praxis assessments required by the state of Virginia for their specific endorsement; and
   3. Have completed statutory requirements.

1. Having met the above conditions, the division 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 iteachVIRGINA acceptance, confirmation of statutory requirements being met, and application fee.

1. 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:
   1. methods in teaching elementary mathematics course (3 semester hours);
   2. methods in teaching elementary science course (3 semester hours);
   3. methods in teaching elementary history and social sciences course (3 semester hours);
   4. language acquisition (3 semester hours);
   5. reading and writing (3 semester hours);
   6. 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.
   7. If not already taken, individuals will need to pass the VCLA and Praxis Reading assessment within the provisional license period.

(Note: The panel determined the competencies of the remaining methods courses could be satisfied with either undergraduate or graduate coursework offered through an institution of higher education or with combined support from the division’s school to which a provisional license holder was assigned, a strong mentorship program, and professional development offered by the division, institutions of higher education, or VDOE-approved microcredential. Currently, only coursework offered by institutions of higher education will satisfy competencies for language acquisition and reading and writing. However, additional work is being completed in stakeholder groups managed by the VDOE to provide guidance on the new VLA competencies and additional options may be accepted in the future.)

1. 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:
   1. language acquisition and reading development (3 semester hours);
   2. literacy in the content areas: (3 semester hours);
   3. 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.
   4. If not already taken, individuals will need to pass the VCLA assessment within the provisional license period.

(Note: Currently, only coursework offered by institutions of higher education will satisfy competencies for language acquisition and reading development and literacy in the content areas. However, additional work is being completed by the VDOE to explore and offer alternate options that align with VLA competencies.)

Provisional license holders may be issued 10-year renewable licenses with endorsements in the respective areas when all licensure requirements have been satisfied.

Each school division partnering with iteach understands that the Board’s approval of this program is limited to their respective school division. Each division 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 local school board discontinues the sponsorship. The school board must notify the Board 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.

School divisions that have submitted applications indicate an acute need for assistance in recruiting teacher candidates. Over the last three years school divisions across the commonwealth have experienced a shortage of qualified teachers and are exploring alternate routes to address the knowledge and skills needed to enter a classroom. Divisions who applied for partnership with iteach report they have classified employees, particularly paraprofessionals and long-term substitutes, with at least a bachelor's degree, interested in a teaching career, but cost, time, and scheduling of traditional programs keep them from pursuing a career in the field. In addition, rural divisions indicate that the closest institution of higher education is an hour or more away, making it difficult for candidates to even participate in-person with a flexible schedule. The larger school divisions applying for partnership with iteach have indicated a significant increase in vacancies being filled with provisionally licensed teachers and positions that simply remain vacant, with a long-term substitute, throughout the year. Additional concerns are rising over the number of provisionally licensed teachers whose license are expiring, teachers who are leaving the field, and a growing number of retirees. Allowing school divisions to pursue this alternate pathway to licensure and partner with iteach will enable schools to leverage local resources to address teacher shortages and move quickly to fill teacher vacancies.

Additionally, as school divisions seek to increase their pool of teaching candidates, affordability of a licensure program also plays a key role. Many individuals who seek to switch careers have already allocated significant funds for foundational degrees, and expensive and time-consuming requirements may deter them from a teaching career in which they have great interest and could contribute their skills. Career switchers come from a variety of life stages and are more likely than traditionally trained students to have family and community obligations, in addition to employment responsibilities. The flexibility of online, asynchronous learning is an option that many career switchers find appealing, and it is one that our institutions of higher education have implemented since before the pandemic. The iteach program will allow for individuals to complete iteach instructional coursework while currently employed, without a loss of salary or benefits, and the majority of the iteach program fees are paid after the candidate is hired, and over the course of the first year in the classroom. Candidates in the iteach program do not qualify for federal financial assistance; therefore, candidates pay a minimal amount of the program fees upfront. They pay an initial upfront fee of $250 and defer the remainder of program costs, $2,800, interest-free until they are hired as teachers, at which time their monthly payment plan begins for the balance of program fees. The total cost of the program is $3050. If the candidate does not complete the program to certification, or the candidate does not obtain a field experience placement, no additional fees are due.

There are currently 11 states that offer the iteach program as an alternate route to license either statewide or to specific school divisions/districts in their state.

## Timetable for Further Review/Action:

It is anticipated that this item will come before the Board for final review on June 15, 2023. Following Board approval, each division 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 approved division alternate routes to licensure will be absorbed by each individual division in accordance with the respective Memorandums of Understanding iteach has with each division.