

MORE PATHS TO CERTIFICATION

Officials consider new requisites to become educator

BY JOHN HILDEBRAND
john.hildebrand@newsday.com

State education officials are exploring a plan that would allow teachers additional pathways besides the longtime requirement of earning a master's degree in order to gain professional certification, according to a document obtained by Newsday.

One option under consideration would allow teachers seeking professional certification to simply earn extra college credits at a graduate level — coursework that the state has not yet spelled out in any detail.

On Long Island, the plan was roundly criticized earlier this week by a group of social studies educators who contended such changes could lower professional standards.

At the state level, education leaders said discussion of change in teacher certification requirements is in the preliminary stage and no timetable for approval has been set.

"The exploratory investigation is still going on," said state Education Commissioner Betty A. Rosa in a Friday phone interview. "No decision has been made, and we are not going to bring anything before the Regents until such time when we have had more conversations."

Rosa referred to the state's



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One potential option would require extra graduate-level courses instead of earning a master's degree.

Board of Regents, which sets much of New York's education policy.

Some teachers with less experience and bachelor's degrees have initial certificates that last five years. By the end of that period, they need a master's and teaching experience to get the professional certificate.

Roger Tilles of Manhasset, the board member representing Long Island, predicted that a master's degree mandate would remain in place even if some recommended changes are ultimately approved.

"I fully expect that the master's degree will continue to be required and will be more meaningful and strengthened," Tilles said.

Proposal outlined in memo

The proposal was first outlined in a Nov. 6 memo circulated among state and local education leaders by James Baldwin, a former senior deputy commissioner who is now Rosa's chief policy adviser. Newsday obtained a copy of the seven-page plan, which is labeled "for discussion purposes only."

One section of the memo describes three "rigorous pathways" teachers might follow in meeting state requirements for professional certification:

- An acceptable master's degree in pedagogy, or in the subject area to be taught or related area.
- A certificate in the subject area from the National Board, a nonprofit group based in Vir-

ginia that recognizes teachers with advanced skills.

■ Completion of graduate-level courses totaling 15 credits in pedagogy, or the subject to be taught or a related area.

The Long Island Council for the Social Studies sent a letter Wednesday objecting to the state's plan as "lowering of the qualifications for becoming a teacher."

The letter noted that the plan, in addition to making master's degrees optional, would lessen the number of extra college credits required of teachers seeking state authorization to provide instruction in subject areas beyond the one for which they were originally certified.

"Who will be teaching our

children if scholarship requirements are substantially reduced?" the letter asked.

The letter was signed by the council's president, Gloria Sesso, and endorsed by its executive board. The organization represents about 850 social studies administrators and teachers.

Salaries, expectations cited

Another argument raised by some conservative critics is that New York State pays its teachers more on average than any other state, and residents expect candidates for the profession to be well-qualified. For the 2022-23 school year, the average teacher salary statewide was \$92,065, compared with a national average of \$68,469, according to the NEA, a national union organization.

Baldwin noted, however, that there are other ways to measure teacher effectiveness besides their degrees. He added that reviewing a state policy on teacher credentials that is 20 years old makes sense at a time when changes in education technology are sweeping through classrooms.

He added that additional options for certification could help draw more people into the teaching profession, at a time when rural areas are finding it hard to recruit candidates.

"We have superintendents in some areas of the state basically telling us that they cannot find appropriately certified teacher," Baldwin said.