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Information/Action

Educator Preparation Committee

Flexibilities for Commission-Approved Educator Preparation Programs Due to the Effects of the Southern California Wildfires

Executive Summary: This agenda item addresses educator preparation program and credential requirements and suggests possible actions the Commission might take to provide flexibility for programs and candidates affected by the Southern California wildfire crisis.

Recommended Action: That the Commission consider the flexibility approaches presented in this agenda item and approve those the Commission deems appropriate.

Presenter: Erin Sullivan, Acting Director, Professional Services Division

Strategic Plan Goal

Educator Preparation and Advancement

- **Goal 1.** Educator preparation programs hold candidates to high standards and adequately prepare them to support all students by using culturally and linguistically responsive and sustaining practices in equitable, inclusive, and safe environments.

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Flexibilities for Commission-Approved Educator Preparation Programs Due to the Effects of the Southern California Wildfires

Introduction

This agenda item addresses educator preparation program and credential requirements and suggests possible actions the Commission might take to provide flexibility for programs and candidates affected by the Southern California wildfire crisis.

Background

On January 7, 2025, Governor Newsom proclaimed a state of emergency for Los Angeles and Ventura Counties in the wake of the state of the Palisades Fire and in light of impending windstorm conditions. Since that date, the fires expanded to include San Diego and San Bernardino counties. According to information provided by the California department of Education as of January 10, more than 1,000 PK-12 schools across 26 districts have experienced closures affecting more than 600,000 students. Within the four counties noted above there are 35 institutions of higher education and 54 local education agencies offering educator preparation programs ranging from preliminary preparation to induction. Data from the Commission's Accreditation Data System shows approximately 47,000 enrolled candidates in preparation programs across the spectrum of credential areas in the counties most directly impacted by the recent fires. Based on metrics used to analyze data obtained during the COVID pandemic, staff estimates approximately 15,500 of the enrolled candidates are in the final year of preparation, a good portion of whom are likely in the process of completing clinical practice, performance assessments (if applicable to their credential area), and/or other program requirements with the intention of completing their program and being credentialed and employed for the upcoming academic year.

The Commission's authority to waive, modify, or provide flexibilities around credential requirements is limited. Requirements that are in statute may not be modified by the Commission. Only two types of actions may modify a statutory requirement: legislative action or an executive order enacted by the Governor. Regulations often clarify or further interpret statute and are adopted by action of the Commission and reviewed and approved by the Office of Administrative Law. As such, regulations may only be changed by promulgating new regulations or may be superseded by an act of the legislature or Governor.

Requirements or policies that have been put in place by the Commission may be modified through formal action of the Commission. In general, Commission adopted program standards define what the program needs to offer and what the candidate needs to know and be able to do, but the manner in which this is done is left largely up to the program. As such, programs have the authority to modify their coursework, clinical practice, and program-embedded

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assessments (other than teaching or administrator performance assessments) while still maintaining alignment to the standards.

Based on actions taken in response to the COVID pandemic, staff has identified areas within credential requirements and adopted program standards where candidates affected by the wildfires in the counties of Los Angeles, Ventura, San Bernardino, and San Diego may not be able to meet the identified expectations. Identified here are some of these areas as well as the Commission's adopted expectation with one or more options for the Commission to consider related to offering some flexibility for the candidates who were on target to complete their educator preparation program in spring/summer 2025.

At this time, staff is suggesting the following possible modifications be applied only to those candidates directly impacted by the fires who were expected to complete their preparation program between January 7 and September 1, 2025. Programs will need to recommend these candidates no later than September 1, 2026 and include a memo, developed by Commission staff, attesting, among other things, that the program has determined the candidate's competency for the credential being earned. Programs will be expected to apply these flexibilities judiciously and may need to evaluate candidates on a case-by-case basis. Finally, programs would be expected to maintain records demonstrating the rationale for any candidate recommended for a credential under one or more of these flexibilities.

Requirements Specified in Adopted Program Standards

The following requirements are specified in the Commission's adopted program standards but not also included in Education Code or Title 5 regulations. Staff suggests suspension or modification of these requirements for the cohort of enrolled candidates directly impacted by the fires who were on track to complete an educator preparation program between January 7 and September 1, 2025. These potential flexibilities are discussed by program area below. All possible flexibilities described in this agenda item are intended to apply only to candidates whose preparation has been directly impacted by the wildfires in the four counties noted earlier in this item.

1. Clinical Practice for Preliminary Multiple and Single Subject credential candidates

A. Hours of Clinical Practice

The standards require that a candidate complete a minimum of 600 hours of clinical practice. Prior to the adoption of the current program standards in 2016, Commission-approved programs had the responsibility to determine how many hours of clinical practice each candidate was required to complete.

Flexibility options that the Commission could consider and possibly approve:

- **Temporarily reduce the required hours of clinical practice.**
 - The Commission could choose to reduce the required number of hours of clinical practice for this year's cohort of prospective completers of preliminary programs to a specified number of hours the Commission determines.

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- The Commission could decide that for the identified candidates, the Commission-approved program will make the determination as to when a candidate has completed sufficient clinical practice. This modification would be noted on the Individual Development Plan (IDP) that the candidate and preliminary program develop for the new teacher to take to their induction program.
- The Commission could consider that if a candidate has passed a Commission-approved Teaching Performance Assessment AND that candidate has completed a specified minimum number of hours of clinical practice (as determined by the Commission), the Commission could deem that these candidates have met the required clinical practice hours. These candidates would not be required to complete the full 600 hours of clinical practice, and this would be noted on the Individual Development Plan (IDP) that the candidate and preliminary program develop for the new teacher to take to their induction program.

B. Candidate Observations for Multiple and Single Subject credential candidates

The standards require that a candidate is formally observed by the program supervisor a minimum of six times each semester/four times each quarter. The purposes of this required support and supervision include ensuring that the PK-12 students are receiving pedagogically sound instruction, that the candidate is receiving feedback from one or more experienced educators, and that the program is able to collect data on how their candidates are performing in their clinical practice for program improvement purposes. Prior to the adoption of the 2016 Program Standards, Commission-approved programs determined the number of formal observations in which candidates participated.

Flexibility option that the Commission could consider and possibly approve:

- **Temporarily modify the specified number of formal observations.** The Commission could consider flexing the specified number of formal observations while still maintaining the requirement that each candidate must be supervised and supported in clinical practice by delegating the responsibility for the determination of sufficient supervision for a candidate to the Commission-approved program.

C. Solo or Final Student Teaching for Multiple and Single Subject credential candidates

The standards require that each candidate complete four weeks of “solo” teaching. Again, prior to the adoption of the current standards in 2016, Commission-approved programs were required to ensure that each candidate completed at least two weeks of solo teaching. During the COVID pandemic, staff provided guidance to programs to help encourage them to think flexibly about what counts as solo teaching.

Flexibility options that the Commission could consider and possibly approve:

- **Temporarily eliminate the four-week solo teaching requirement.** The Commission could suspend the four-week solo teaching requirement and rely on Commission-approved teacher preparation programs to ensure that candidates have had sufficient opportunities to independently work with students.

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2. Teacher and Administrator Induction

Both teacher and administrator induction programs are designed to be two-year programs and are defined as such in the adopted program standards. During school closures, concerns arise around second year program participants who were meeting all program requirements and whether they will be required to extend their program to make up for the weeks or months when the schools were closed. The Commission might want to provide some flexibility by allowing participation in the 2024-25 school year to be defined as a year of participation even though the actual timeframe may be affected by the wildfire situation.

Flexibility options that the Commission could consider and possibly approve:

- **Designate the 2024-25 year of induction program participation to be a full year.**
The Commission could affirm that the 2024-25 year of participation in induction is a full year even though the school year has been interrupted by the wildfire crisis. Although school buildings have closed or been destroyed, it is anticipated that teachers will be teaching and administrators will be working. The expectation is that new teachers and administrators continue to work with their mentors and coaches in this time of change. Further, given that all educators are working to address the numerous challenges of rehoming students at new school sites and/or providing online instruction, some consideration may be warranted to recognize the induction work that has taken place to date and the work educators are currently doing in this time of unanticipated crisis. This would allow new teachers and administrators to focus on the immediate needs of their students while recognizing work they have done in recent weeks and will continue to do to address the crisis as a valuable part of their induction experience. This action would include all candidates who were on track to complete the year as defined by the program. Programs would still maintain the ability to not recommend a second-year candidate for the Clear credential if the individual had not been participating in the program and making satisfactory progress at the time of the wildfire crisis.

Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Commission consider the following options and, where appropriate, approve the options for the current candidates enrolled in a Commission-approved educator preparation program who have been directly impacted by the wildfires in the counties of Los Angeles, San Diego, Ventura, and San Bernardino. ***These options are only proposed for candidates who are on track to complete their educator preparation program between January 7 and September 1, 2025. Programs will be required to recommend candidates from this cohort by September 1, 2026 and include a memo, developed by Commission staff, attesting, among other things, that the program has determined the candidate's competency for the credential being earned. Programs will also be expected to apply these flexibilities judiciously and may need to evaluate candidates on a case-by-case basis. Finally, programs will be expected to maintain records demonstrating the rationale for any candidate recommended for a credential under one or more of these flexibilities.***

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Preliminary Multiple and Single Subject Credential Requirements

With respect to the 600 hours of clinical practice, the Commission could do one or more of the following:

- a. The Commission could choose to reduce the required number of hours of clinical practice to a specified number of hours, as determined by the Commission, for individuals who meet the criteria outlined above; and/or
- b. The Commission could decide that for the identified candidates, the Commission-approved program will make the determination as to when a candidate has completed sufficient clinical practice. This modification would be noted on the Individual Development Plan (IDP) that the candidate and preliminary program develop for the new teacher to take to their induction program; and/or
- c. The Commission could consider that if a candidate has passed a Commission-approved Teaching Performance Assessment AND that candidate has completed a specified minimum number of hours of clinical practice (as determined by the Commission), the Commission could deem that these candidates have met the required clinical practice hours. These candidates would not be required to complete the full 600 hours of clinical practice, and this would be noted on the Individual Development Plan (IDP) that the candidate and preliminary program develop for the new teacher to take to their induction program.

With respect to the number of formal observations

- d. The Commission could consider suspending or eliminating the specified number of formal observations while still maintaining the requirement that each candidate must be supervised and supported in clinical practice by delegating the responsibility for the determination of sufficient supervision for a candidate to the Commission-approved program.

With respect to solo or final student teaching

- e. The Commission could suspend the four-week solo teaching requirement and rely on Commission-approved teacher preparation programs to ensure that candidates have had sufficient opportunities to independently work with students.

Teacher and Administrator Induction

- f. The Commission could affirm that the 2024-25 year of participation in induction is a full year even though the school year has been interrupted by the wildfire crisis.

In addition to the above, staff requests the Commission authorize staff to seek additional flexibilities, as needed, with the legislature and/or the administration.

Next Steps

Based on the Commission's action(s), if any, staff will disseminate information to all Commission-approved programs in the counties of Los Angeles, San Diego, Ventura, and San Bernardino that have been affected by the recent wildfires about the flexibilities that may be applied to currently enrolled candidates who have been directly impacted by the wildfires.