



House K-12 Budget Committee
HB2521: Proponent Testimony
Isabelle Welch, Director of Government Affairs
American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence, Inc.

Madam Chair and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of HB2521, which focuses on alternative teacher certification. My name is Isabelle Welch, and I represent American Board, an organization with a rich history in providing a quick and affordable pathway to teacher licensure for career professionals.

American Board, founded by the U.S. Department of Education in 2001 and has been a national leader in alternative teacher certification for over two decades. We currently operate in 14 states and have certified more than 17,000 teachers nationwide including more than 4,000 in Missouri. American Board provides local career professionals, who hold a bachelor's degree in a subject other than education, a quick and affordable pathway to teacher licensure.

Participants in American Board's program are on average 39 years old and generally fall into one of four categories:

1. **Career changers** (these are your accountants who want to teach math, or your journalists who decide to teach English)
2. **Military Veterans and their spouses** (American Board is a national partner with the DOD SkillBridge program, and provides a discounted rate to veterans and their spouses)
3. **Stay-at-home parents transitioning to the workforce** (these are people who received their bachelor's degree, stayed home to raise their kids, and are now looking to reenter the workforce)
4. **Substitute teachers and paraprofessionals** (these are people already working in your schools who are looking to become fully licensed)

American Board's program provides a pathway for people to become teachers quickly and affordably. Our program currently costs around \$1900, and generally takes less than 1 year to complete, depending on subject area.

American Board's program consists of coursework and exams covering **subject area content and pedagogy**, the art and science of teaching. Of particular note, **50%** of American Board's program is **pedagogy**, and candidates must prove their competency by passing a pedagogy and content area exam before they can complete our program. Third-party studies show that American Board's content and pedagogy coursework and exams are strongly aligned to traditional teacher preparation programs. American Board has a proven record of its

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commitment to rigorous pedagogy and content area exams, ensuring that our graduates are ready to thrive in the classroom. In fact, American Board's exams are shown to be as rigorous or more rigorous than the aligning Praxis exams, depending on the content area.

Drexel University surveyed more than 150 school principals across states about the quality of their American Board-trained teachers. This study found that 97 percent of principals planned to retain or had retained their American Board beyond the crucial 3-year mark. This means that, after observing these teachers in the classroom and considering the growth of their students, 97 percent of principals plan to continue employing their American Board trained teachers. When asked about the classroom skills of American Board trained teachers, employing principals indicate that American Board teachers are equally strong or stronger than traditionally prepared teachers across 95% of evaluated teacher qualities, including classroom management, subject-matter knowledge, conflict resolution, collaboration, and leadership. This is likely due to American Board's teachers having roots in the local community and bringing their previous workplace experience and maturity to the classroom.

American Board and other alternative teacher preparation programs provide an invaluable tool for states in addressing the growing teacher shortage. Alternative programs are not intended to replace traditional programs but are a way to engage individuals looking to enter the workforce who may not have access to a traditional preparation program. American Board's program will complement existing pathways and enhance the pool of quality teachers in schools across the state.

In conclusion, I urge the committee to support HB2521, recognizing the positive impact alternative teacher certification programs, such as American Board's, can have on addressing the teacher shortage and providing diverse and experienced professionals the opportunity to contribute to our education system. Thousands of schools across the country rely on their American Board trained teachers, and this legislation can help address the evolving needs of our communities, ensuring that every student has access to high-quality educators.