# Agenda Item: B

## Date: March 23, 2023

## Title: Final 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*](https://townhall.virginia.gov/L/GetFile.cfm?File=C:\TownHall\docroot\GuidanceDocs\201\GDoc_DOE_6796_v3.pdf) ([*Guidelines*](https://townhall.virginia.gov/L/GetFile.cfm?File=C:\TownHall\docroot\GuidanceDocs\201\GDoc_DOE_6796_v3.pdf)). [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*](https://townhall.virginia.gov/L/GetFile.cfm?File=C:\TownHall\docroot\GuidanceDocs\201\GDoc_DOE_6796_v3.pdf) became effective on January 23, 2020, after the 30-day public comment period.

Pursuant to the [*Guidelines*](https://townhall.virginia.gov/L/GetFile.cfm?File=C:\TownHall\docroot\GuidanceDocs\201\GDoc_DOE_6796_v3.pdf), 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 (VDOE) 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 approve the recommendation of the department’s panel regarding ACPS’ petition for an alternate route to licensure.

## 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’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*](https://townhall.virginia.gov/L/GetFile.cfm?File=C:\TownHall\docroot\GuidanceDocs\201\GDoc_DOE_6796_v3.pdf) 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 VDOE staff raised questions about the process set forth in the effective [*Guidelines*](https://townhall.virginia.gov/L/GetFile.cfm?File=C:\TownHall\docroot\GuidanceDocs\201\GDoc_DOE_6796_v3.pdf). After consultation with the Office of the Attorney General, a minor technical revision to the [*Guidelines*](https://townhall.virginia.gov/L/GetFile.cfm?File=C:\TownHall\docroot\GuidanceDocs\201\GDoc_DOE_6796_v3.pdf) 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](https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title22.1/chapter15/section22.1-298.1/#v1/) N. The revised [*Guidelines*](https://townhall.virginia.gov/L/GetFile.cfm?File=C:\TownHall\docroot\GuidanceDocs\201\GDoc_DOE_6796_v3.pdf) became effective on December 22, 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 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*](https://townhall.virginia.gov/L/GetFile.cfm?File=C:\TownHall\docroot\GuidanceDocs\201\GDoc_DOE_6796_v3.pdf), 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*](https://townhall.virginia.gov/L/GetFile.cfm?File=C:\TownHall\docroot\GuidanceDocs\201\GDoc_DOE_6796_v3.pdf) 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, ACPS 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*](https://law.lis.virginia.gov/admincode/title8/agency20/chapter543/section120/) 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 ACPS application, in summary, proposed for individuals who met the following criteria be issued a Virginia full, renewable license, with no deficiencies, if the individual met the following criteria:

1. Hold a bachelor’s degree from an accredited college or university.
2. Hold a credential (for the level at which they are being hired to teach) 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.
3. Have successfully passed all examinations required by the state of Virginia for their specific endorsement (i.e. VCLA, Praxis, etc.)

The panel determined that while the ACPS proposed route to licensure was compelling, there was a concern the Montessori credential did not exclusively satisfy all of the competencies of an approved program. The panel found the professional studies competencies in the areas of human development and learning, curriculum and instruction, classroom behavior and management, assessment of and for learning, and the foundations of education and the teaching profession were satisfied in all three national Montessori credentialing programs. In addition, the panel praised the attention and commitment to the supervised clinical experiences each national program provided. However, the panel determined 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. |

As the panel discussed the Montessori program, their focus turned to Page 23 of Attachment A, which is the first page after the application itself, that introduces Montessori. The introduction specifically indicates that Montessori is a method of teaching:

*“Montessori teachers are* [*prepared*](https://amshq.org/Educators/Montessori-Careers/Become-a-Montessori-Educator/About-AMS-TEP) *specifically to teach in Montessori environments, and their coursework focuses on Montessori philosophy, history and pedagogy, with instruction on other philosophies, histories and pedagogies as a secondary focus. Child development from birth through adolescence is covered extensively, and predominantly with a Montessori lens, including a stronger focus on the age group intended for the student teacher.*

*Montessori teachers are not instructed on state or local assessments because the teacher preparation programs are almost never only focused on a specific location but prepare teachers who go on to teach all over the country and the world. In addition, technology in the form of computers or internet usage is not a part of the Montessori early childhood classroom and is added over time through elementary and middle school years as a purposeful tool. Montessori’s theory that children first think and learn best in concrete ways and then children will abstract knowledge as they develop informs this methodology.”*

After deep conversation, it was determined the content coursework 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 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, 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. Indicators of learning loss during the pandemic, and results from the 2021-2022 administration of the Standards of Learning (SOL) assessments, suggest a continuation and worsening of the trends we see in national assessment data related to reading and writing. 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 matrix provided by ACPS in the application indicates (pages86-87 of full electronic document; pages 64-65 indicated on the printed application) the professional studies coursework for early/primary education, preK-3, and elementary preK-6 – language acquisition and reading and writing will be addressed in all of the national Montessori credentialing programs, however, the not all of the competence areas, specifically phonetics, semantics, syntax, morphology, phonology, and pragmatics were addressed consistently in each national program, and did not appear that the science of reading was addressed at all. The matrix also indicates (pages 88-89 of full electronic document; pages 66-67 indicated on printed application) the professional studies coursework for middle education – language acquisition and reading development and literacy in the content area will be addressed by the division’s required curricula and therefore use the Montessori philosophy as a guide to deliver the curriculum. However, that does not address how the competencies will be met to ensure the teacher has 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, 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 recommended minor modifications to the application 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:

1. All candidates for the ACPS Montessori Alternate Pathway to Licensure Program will:
   1. Hold at minimum a bachelor’s degree from an accredited college or university;
   2. 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;
   3. Have successfully passed the required content Praxis assessments required by the state of Virginia for their specific endorsement; and
   4. Have completed statutory requirements
2. 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.
3. 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. reading and writing (3 semester hours);
   5. 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.
   6. If not already taken, individuals will need to pass the VCLA and Praxis Reading assessment within the provisional license period.
4. 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.

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

ACPS understands that the Board’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 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.

There are currently ten states that offer an alternate route to licensure for public educators who hold a Montessori credential (Attachment C). Of these ten states, for those individuals who hold a national Montessori credential, six states have additional coursework, assessments and/or professional studies; three states require an additional assessment; and one state does not have any additional requirements. Eight of these states allow for these teachers to teach in public Montessori schools only, while two of the states have no restrictions regarding the school. It’s important to note that one state, Ohio, allows for individuals following this pathway for licensure to teach in public Montessori schools only during the provisional period, and then once all requirements are completed, the full, renewable license that is issued allows the individual to teach in any school.

During the Board meeting in February 2023, Board members were reminded the *Guidelines* offer an alternate route to licensure, but do not provide for a new license to be created. Hence, the panel’s responsibility was to recommend a program that would meet the approved program regulations that would lead to an existing license issued by the Board. Also during the meeting, Board members inquired if there were additional options for the Montessori program they may consider during this final review. The item on final review is for approval of an alternate route to an existing license. The existing licenses Collegiate Professional and Postgraduate Professional licenses, as well as the Elementary Education and Middle School endorsements, currently have no restrictions. It is at the discretion of the Board to create licenses or endorsements that may have restrictions, however, that creation is subject to the rulemaking requirements of the Administrative Process Act (APA). In addition, creating a license or endorsements with restrictions requires significant development with our licensure database and revisions to data reporting, in collaboration with the Office of Data Services, to ensure data reporting for the Master Schedule Collection and the IPAL reports are accurate. Typically, this development and creation is completed during the APA process and prepared for deployment when the new licenses and endorsements are effective.

## Timetable for Further Review/Action:

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. In addition, ACPS will submit annual reports related to the administration and success of the 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.