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## Missouri's Teacher Shortage Requires Creative Fixes

One of the most important responsibilities of a society is to educate its youth. Education today faces many challenges, not the least of which is a shortage of teachers in certain critical areas. Severe teacher shortages have cut into not just the depth, but the breadth of our teacher pool and graduation rates in some parts of Missouri are dismal. A recent study showed the average graduation rate for Kansas City metropolitan school districts is 45.7 percent. Of the 50 most populated cities in the U.S., Kansas City ranks near the bottom with the 40<sup>th</sup> lowest percentage of passing graduates. Overall, Missouri has a 75 percent graduation rate and although many schools in Eastern Jackson County are superb, many other districts are struggling.

This session the Senate has moved to help address this problem with the passage of [Senate Bill 1066](#), which creates an alternative path for career-changing professionals to become certified to teach in secondary schools. The bill has been passed by both houses of the Legislature and now awaits approval from the governor to become law. Under the bill, a person would be required to complete certification from the American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence. In addition to coursework and certification exams, potential teachers would need to complete a background check and verify the ability to work with children by completing 60 hours of classroom instruction under the supervision of a mentor-teacher.

Any person who has earned a bachelor's degree or higher in any discipline would be eligible to participate in this alternative certification program to earn his or her teaching certificate for grades 6-12 in both public and private schools in Missouri. However, the bill exempts early childhood, elementary and special education, where a teacher must still receive traditional certification.

The program was designed to offer working professionals an opportunity to bring their real-world experience to the classroom. This change in the law would allow students to benefit from the unique perspective of these teachers — enriching their learning experience.

On a related note, my concern over the critical need to help Missouri's kids compete in the global economy led me to sponsor legislation that proposes allowing schools to provide financial incentives to qualified math and science teachers. Similar to SB 1066, [SB 833](#) would make it easier for individuals with a state-approved and certified bachelor's degree in math or science to enter the teaching field. We need to motivate our best and brightest to enter the teaching profession, even if they didn't necessarily achieve certification through traditional methods. If we do not adequately train our kids in math and science, the United States will continue to fall behind in these fundamental and critical areas. We are currently in great danger of being bypassed by much of the rest of the industrialized world.

Quality education is not a partisan issue and finding solutions will require outside-the-box thinking. These proposals are a good start towards reversing these dangerous trends. It is time for Missouri to move forward and give our students the very best education we can.

If you have any comments or questions about this week's column or any other matter involving state government, please do not hesitate to contact me. You can reach my office by e-mail at [matt\\_bartle@senate.mo.gov](mailto:matt_bartle@senate.mo.gov) or by phone at (888) 711-9278. My web address is <http://www.senate.mo.gov/bartle>.

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