

Sen. Ridgeway's Teacher Certification Bill Among First to Pass in 2008

Last week, [SB 1066](#) became the first Senate bill to be passed by both the Senate and the House, and has now been sent to the governor's desk where it awaits his signature. The legislation addresses issues I feel very strongly about — education quality and quality teachers.

Senate Bill 1066 creates an alternative route for career changing professionals to become certified to teach in secondary schools. A teacher would be required to complete certification from the American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence (ABCTE), a non-profit organization based in Washington, D.C. that is funded through federal grants. In addition to coursework and certification exams, prospective teachers would need to already hold a bachelor's degree or higher, 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. 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. Busy professionals would receive certification without having to sacrifice their current jobs — and income. A 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.

Missouri is in desperate need of qualified teachers in the classrooms, especially in the areas of math and science. To fill these positions, it's necessary that we look to alternatives to get capable educators into our classrooms as soon as possible.

The current certification requirements have an obvious place in the process, but they make it very difficult for a person interested in switching careers to become certified to teach — and nearly impossible for Missouri to fill all of the openings in certain subject areas.

As a lawyer, I have a Juris Doctorate degree and am considered qualified to teach at any college or university. Yet high schools in Missouri cannot hire me to teach basic government to their students. This simply doesn't make sense. Senate Bill 1066 provides a means to bring new teachers into the profession without instituting a sweeping change in certification, while adding to our teacher pool and enriching the students who benefit from their teacher's real-world experience. Alternative certification is not a total solution for Missouri's shortage of qualified teachers, but it is one piece of the puzzle.

ABCTE reports that over 100 people are contacting them daily to inquire about the requirements of the legislation. For Missourians interested in this alternative teacher certification, I encourage you to visit the ABCTE's website at www.abcte.org. If you have any questions about these issues or any other legislation, please contact my office at (573) 751-2547 or email me at luann.ridgeway@senate.mo.gov.