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Board adopts new educator certification rules

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota Board of Education adopted new educator certification rules earlier today, overhauling the state’s current certification system.

Today’s adoption of rules marks the culmination of a process more than two years in the making. The Department of Education has been leading stakeholders from both South Dakota’s K-12 and higher education communities through a review of the current certification system.

“This is an exciting day,” said South Dakota Education Secretary Dr. Melody Schopp. “As a state, we must seek to ensure our educators meet high standards so that our students are being taught by qualified professionals. And by engaging a wide variety of stakeholders throughout this process, we have buy-in from the education community to remove unnecessary barriers, in order to help schools meet local needs.”

Among major areas of change is the creation of a new category of certificates, called educator permits. Several of these permits, like performing artist, expert lecturer and international teacher permits, could help small schools that struggle to find certified teachers in certain areas. In addition, the process for alternative certification has been revised and reciprocity rules have been updated.

A change was also made to middle level endorsements. As an example under the previous system, a teacher might have taught science at a particular grade level in an elementary school, but later moved to teaching science at that same grade level in a school structured as a middle school. Although still teaching the same grade level, simply moving to a school structured as a middle school would have required the teacher to have both middle level and elementary endorsements. Under the new rules, school structure will no longer dictate endorsement requirements for teachers of middle grade levels, typically grades 5, 6, 7 and 8. A middle level endorsement is still outlined in the new rules for districts who may wish to require it.

Pending approval by the Legislature’s Rules Review Committee, those rule changes that do not impose increased requirements on educators go into effect July 1, 2017. Rule changes that do impose increased requirements on educators go into effect July 1, 2019.