



March 10, 2020

The Honorable Patrick O'Donnell
Chair, Assembly Committee on Education
Legislative Office Building
1020 N Street, Room 159
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: AB 1982 (Cunningham) as Introduced – OPPOSE

Dear Chair O'Donnell:

On behalf of EdVoice, I write in opposition to AB 1982, which would significantly lower the bar for teacher candidates to meet demonstrated minimum proficiency in basic reading, writing and mathematics skills to teach in a California public school.

Establishing a requirement for objective demonstration of minimum proficiency in basic skills is a state consumer protection policy to ensure the fundamental right in the California Constitution that every student has an equitable opportunity to a basic education, and provides a minimum guarantee to parents and stakeholders that the California educator workforce is competent in basic skills. The state administers the minimum standard in statute and regulations established by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC), using the California Basic Educational Skills Test (CBEST) and other assessments with the same minimum basic skills content domain coverage. This bill allows teacher candidates to substitute coursework for the assessment requirement.

AB 1982 significantly lowers the bar by expanding current authorized exemptions beyond other objective assessment-based demonstrations of minimum basic skills competency, including scores from the SAT/ACT, AP exams, CSU EAP or CSU placement examination, basic skills exam from another state, or passing the California Subject Examination for Teachers (CSET), or teaching adults in nonacademic assignments, as specified. Under current law and regulations, the CTC determined passing scores on the CBEST or other alternative examinations remain valid indefinitely for the purpose of meeting the basic skills requirement.

In *Association of Mexican-American Educators, et al. v. State of California, et al.* (2000), the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed the decision to uphold the CBEST and explicitly ruled that as a prerequisite for employment the CBEST was, "validated properly." The district ruling explicitly found the policy change proposed by AB 1982, "that college GPAs are largely fungible and of equal value no matter where they were earned" with regards to qualifying coursework for the basic skills requirement – is outright "preposterous." That ruling also opined "the CBEST remains an objective, cost-effective, and valid way to assure that teachers in the public schools possess basic skills," adding that "[n]one of plaintiffs' proposed alternatives [including coursework] is an adequate substitute."

By authorizing a "B" grade on unspecified coursework in lieu of failure to pass all or a portion of the CBEST or other enumerated objective assessments that cover minimum basic skills, AB 1982 authorizes the establishment of thousands of individual standards of basic skills to be uniquely determined by at least 700 "credential preparation programs" in reviewing transcripts of coursework leading to a degree in at

least 427 regionally accredited institutions of higher education in California alone, and 7,021 institutions nationwide.

AB 1982 asserts all college “B” grades across all colleges in the United States are equivalent by suggesting a “B” grade on coursework for ANY academic course leading to an associate, baccalaureate or higher degree in any regionally accredited institution of higher education anywhere in the United States has the same rigor of demonstrated content mastery in basic skills. Accordingly, AB 1982 would have individual credential preparation programs undergo the burdensome and costly administrative review of transcripts, and potentially expose programs to litigation for failure to recognize courses believed by an applicant to satisfy the exemption standard, including for grades on courses for which the institution of higher education attended may no longer offer, or exist.

The current CBEST passing standard (and that of available alternatives) does not place an unreasonable burden on teacher candidates. In mathematics, often cited as a difficult subject, the highest Common Core standard assessed on the CBEST is a 7th-grade-level content rigor of pre-Algebra, below Math I. The current “bar” set by the basic skills requirement is not an excessive barrier to entry. In fact, the district court examining the evidence noted that the “CTC would be justified in raising the cut scores.”

EdVoice believes there is no need to further lower the intellectual bar to attract minimally competent educators to serve our public school students. More specifically, as reported by former and current teachers themselves, working conditions, assignments, training and support, salary, housing and labor market issues more directly affect decisions of highly effective and highly qualified teachers to enter or stay in the profession. In fact, by lowering the bar, it’s more likely that school boards would be tempted to lower or flatten the salary schedule for novice teachers, the opposite incentive needed to attract new teacher candidates, particularly in high cost regions of the state, and in high demand subject areas.

California has a constitutional responsibility to ensure every public school is staffed to ensure every individual student is taught by an educator that has a basic understanding of reading, writing, and mathematics. AB 1982 essentially eliminates a legitimate uniform minimum protection for no reasonable purpose. Accordingly, we respectfully urge you to oppose AB 1982. If you have any questions regarding our opposition, please do not hesitate to contact me directly.

Respectfully,



Bill Lucia
President

CC: Hon. Jordan Cunningham, Assembly Member, 35th Assembly District
Hon. Vince Fong, Assembly Member, 34th Assembly District
Hon. Buffy Wicks, Assembly Member, 15th Assembly District
Members, Assembly Committee on Education
Anthony Williams, Legislative Affairs Secretary, Office of Governor Newsom
Jennifer Johnson, Deputy Secretary for Legislative Affairs, Office of Governor Newsom
Jeff Bell, Program Budget Manager, Department of Finance