Petition for an Equitable Competency Pathway for Educators with Disabilities

Request for Nevada Legislative and Regulatory Reform

To the Nevada Legislature, Nevada Department of Education, and Commission on Professional Standards in Education:

We, the undersigned educators, teacher candidates, education professionals, students, and members of the public, respectfully petition the State of Nevada to establish a more equitable process for educators with documented disabilities to demonstrate competency for educator licensure.

The Issue

Nevada's educator-licensure system recognizes that competency may sometimes be demonstrated through coursework rather than solely through standardized testing. Under the current Nevada Department of Education approved-course framework, an individual who has attempted and not passed a Praxis Core examination in reading, writing, or mathematics may satisfy the applicable requirement through an approved course of study completed with a grade of B or better.

Previously Completed Coursework Should Matter

An individual should not lose the value of legitimate academic work simply because the course was completed before it appeared on a state's current approved-course list. A student with a documented disability may complete a mathematics course specifically designed or approved for students with disabilities as part of an appropriate academic pathway. That student may successfully complete the course, earn college credit, and use the course toward completion of a degree. If the state later establishes a list of approved courses that does not include that previously completed course, the student's academic achievement should not simply become irrelevant. Instead, the applicant should have the right to request an individualized review of the previously completed coursework.

Disability-Specific Coursework Should Not Be Treated as Less Valuable

Students with disabilities may sometimes take different courses or follow different academic pathways because their educational needs require accommodations or specialized instruction. A disability-related academic pathway should not automatically become a disadvantage when that individual later seeks professional licensure. If a student successfully completes a legitimate college course designed to address a particular competency, the fact that the course was specifically structured to meet the student's disability-related educational needs should not, by itself, make the coursework less valuable.

Proposed Equitable Competency Pathway

We ask Nevada to establish an Equitable Competency Pathway for Educators with Disabilities. Under this pathway, an applicant with a documented disability would be permitted to request individualized consideration of previously completed academic coursework and other relevant evidence of competency. The applicant would still be required to demonstrate the applicable competency. The pathway would simply provide an equitable method for evaluating that competency.

Previously Completed Courses Should Be Eligible for Review

An applicant should be permitted to submit previously completed college coursework for individualized review when the course was completed at an appropriately accredited institution; the applicant successfully completed the course; the course addresses, in whole or in substantial part, the competency required for licensure; the course was part of the applicant's degree, educator-preparation, or approved academic pathway; or the course was specifically designed or approved to address the educational needs of students with disabilities. The fact that the course was completed before the current approved-course list was established or amended should not automatically disqualify it from consideration.

The State Should Evaluate the Substance of the Course

The reviewing authority should be permitted to examine course descriptions, syllabi, learning outcomes, topics covered, number of credits, institution, grade earned, relationship to the applicant's degree program, whether the course was designed for students with disabilities, institutional documentation, and other relevant evidence.

The Same Standard — A More Equitable Method

This proposal does not ask Nevada to establish a lower standard for educators with disabilities. The competency standard should remain the same. What should change is the ability to demonstrate that competency. A standardized examination may be appropriate for many applicants. However, when a documented disability creates substantial barriers to demonstrating competency through that particular testing format, Nevada should provide an individualized mechanism for determining whether the person can demonstrate the required competency through other reliable evidence.

Alternative Evidence Could Include

- Previously completed college coursework
- Disability-specific coursework
- Coursework completed as part of an educator-preparation program
- A combination of relevant courses
- An alternative competency examination
- A portfolio demonstrating competency
- Supervised performance
- Relevant professional experience where appropriate
- Institutional verification of competencies demonstrated
- Other evidence approved by the appropriate state authority

A Clear and Transparent Process

Nevada should establish a publicly available process explaining who may request an alternative competency review; what documentation is required; what coursework and evidence may be submitted; how previously completed courses will be evaluated; who has authority to make the determination; how long the review should take; how the applicant will receive the decision; what happens if the request is denied; and whether the applicant may request administrative or regulatory review.

Why This Matters

Nevada needs qualified educators. People with disabilities should not be forced to repeat legitimate academic work solely because their original coursework was completed through a disability-related pathway or before a particular course was added to a state-approved list. A person who successfully completed college coursework should be given a meaningful opportunity to show that the coursework demonstrates the competency required for licensure.

This Is About Equity, Not Exemption

We recognize the importance of maintaining high standards for Nevada educators. Children and families deserve qualified teachers. Nothing in this proposal would change that. The purpose is to ensure that a disability does not create an unnecessary second barrier after an individual has already demonstrated competency through legitimate academic work. Equity does not mean lowering the standard. Equity means providing a fair opportunity to demonstrate the standard.

Requested Legislative and Regulatory Action

1. Establish an Equitable Competency Pathway for educators with documented disabilities.
2. Require individualized consideration of previously completed college coursework when an applicant requests such consideration.
3. Prohibit the automatic exclusion of disability-specific coursework solely because the course was not listed on the state's approved-course list when it was completed.
4. Permit applicants to submit evidence demonstrating the content and competencies addressed by previously completed coursework.
5. Establish standards and procedures for evaluating whether previously completed coursework satisfies or substantially demonstrates the required competency.
6. Allow consideration of other reliable evidence of competency when appropriate.
7. Maintain the same underlying competency standards for all educator applicants.
8. Establish a written decision-making and review process so applicants understand why an alternative competency request was approved or denied.
9. Publish the process clearly on the Nevada Department of Education's educator-licensure resources.
10. Ensure that disability-related educational pathways do not create an unintended disadvantage in professional licensure.

Our Request to Nevada

We ask Nevada to recognize a simple principle: when an educator with a documented disability has successfully completed legitimate academic work that may demonstrate a required competency, that work deserves to be considered. A course should not become worthless simply because the State later changes its approved-course list. A disability-related academic pathway should not become a disadvantage when the student transitions from higher education into professional licensure.

Contact / Submission Information

Recommended recipients:

Commission on Professional Standards in Education (COPS): COPS@doe.nv.gov
COPS is Nevada's regulatory commission that sets educator licensure standards and develops regulations governing examinations for initial licensure.

Nevada Department of Education — Educator Licensure: license@doe.nv.gov

Nevada State Legislature: Submit to the Assemblymember and State Senator representing your district. The Nevada Legislature provides an official “Who's My Legislator?” lookup and current legislator contact lists at **leg.state.nv.us**.

COPS administrative contact: geraldine.mendiola@doe.nv.gov

Requested Action

We ask the Nevada Legislature to introduce and support legislation, and we ask the appropriate regulatory bodies to adopt regulations, establishing an Equitable Competency Pathway for Educators with Disabilities consistent with these principles.

Respectfully,
Lakesha Harden
Nevada Educator