

West Virginia Alternative Certification Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is alternative certification?

Alternative certification (AC) is an “alternate” pathway to teacher certification that is different than the traditional route and only available to fill critical need and shortage areas in West Virginia public schools. School districts with approved AC programs may offer employment to eligible individuals for positions that have been posted at least twice (for a minimal ten-day period) and for which no fully certified applicant has applied. Candidates accepted into the district’s approved AC program hold an alternative teaching certificate while completing the program of study. Upon successful completion of the program, assessment and evaluation, candidates may be recommended for an initial teaching certificate by the school district.

2. What do districts look for when reviewing eligibility and qualifications of individuals they are considering for participation in their approved AC program?

West Virginia Board of Education (WVBE) minimal eligibility criteria:

- a. General requirements (at least 18 years of age, a US citizen, of good moral character, and physically, mentally and emotionally qualified to perform the duties of a teacher);
- b. Clear record criminal history check to the WVDE;
- c. Hold at least a bachelor's degree with an overall 2.5 GPA from a regionally accredited institution of higher education;
- d. Have passed the Praxis basic skills assessment, *Core Academic Skills for Educators*, or qualify for an exemption.
- e. General education endorsements only: Have passed the WVBE-required Praxis content exam for the endorsement that the candidate is seeking.
- f. Academic qualifications and/or occupational qualifications
 - General education endorsements: Hold an academic major on an official transcript and/or occupational qualifications that reasonably indicate the individual will be competent to pass the subject matter tests and fill the teaching position.
 - Special education endorsements: No specific academic or occupational qualifications are required for special education endorsements (except for Deaf and Hard of Hearing**), because the approved program of study provides the special education content as well as the pedagogy preparation.

3. What documentation do school districts use to verify general education candidate qualifications?

- a. **Academic Qualifications:** Official transcripts which indicate the individual possesses an academic major that is the same as or similar to the endorsement sought and the subject of the posted position. The academic qualifications provide evidence that reasonably indicates the candidate will be competent to fill the teaching position.
- b. **Occupational Qualifications:** Candidates complete application form [V10](#) (wage earning experience verification) or DD 214 (active military) describing experiences that are the same as or similar to the endorsement sought and the subject of the posted position.

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The occupational qualifications provide evidence that reasonably indicates the candidate will be competent to fill the teaching position. Experiences identified on V10 must clearly describe how the experiences correlate with the content standards of the subject the candidate will be teaching.

- Non-educational occupational experiences: The Office of Educator Effectiveness and Licensure has determined that one calendar year of non-educational occupational experience related to the endorsement area is acceptable.
- Educational occupational experiences: The experience, i. e. substitute teaching or teaching while on permit, must have taken place within the endorsement area being recommended for licensure and for not less than 133 days in a continuous position.

4. What are the testing requirements for converting from an alternative certificate to the professional teaching certificate once the AC program of study has been successfully completed?

- a. **General Education:** At the conclusion of the approved AC program, teachers in the general education teaching path must meet the proficiency score(s) on the required state competency exam(s) in pedagogy, *Praxis Principles of Learning and Teaching*.
- b. **Special Education:** At the conclusion of the AC program, teachers in the special education teaching path must meet the proficiency score(s) on the required state competency exam(s) in special education content for the endorsement sought AND the state competency exam in pedagogy, *Praxis Principles of Learning and Teaching*, for the appropriate grade levels.

5. When must individuals enroll into the AC program?

The enrollment date for the AC program of study must be the same as the employment date to assure that candidates are engaged in their program of study while teaching.

6. May individuals on permit (first class or substitute) participate in the district's alternative certification program?

Yes. Eligible individuals, who are on first class or substitute permits may be transitioned into the AC program and must complete the entire AC program of study.

7. May individuals who are currently enrolled in a "traditional" teacher preparation program use their Praxis exam scores toward qualifying for an alternative teaching certificate, if the test(s) are no longer effective in policy?

Praxis scores attained while *continuously enrolled* in an approved "traditional" teacher preparation program may be used even if the test and/or score requirements of WVBE Policy 5202 have changed. If individuals are not considered continuously enrolled in a WVBE approved "traditional" teacher preparation program, they are required to present passing scores on the Praxis exam(s) *currently identified* in policy.

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8. May individuals who are already certified in a *general education* endorsement seek a special education endorsement through an alternative certification program of study?

Yes. Special education AC programs offer both special education *content and pedagogy* coursework/professional development specific to special education. The candidate must successfully complete the *entire* AC program of study and then pass the WVBE-required test(s) for the specific special education content of the endorsement and also pass the *Praxis Principles of Learning and Teaching* for the appropriate grade levels.

9. May individuals who are already certified in *special education* seek a general education endorsement through an alternative certification program of study?

No. General education AC programs only offer *pedagogy* coursework/professional development, and the certified teacher has already experienced the pedagogical studies. A route already exists in policy for individuals who possess a special education certification to add an additional endorsement by presenting passing scores on the required content Praxis exam(s). A guidance document may be found at <http://wvde.state.wv.us/certification/forms/>.

The following FAQs provide technical assistance to school districts:

10. Once a district receives approval of its AC program, what are the steps to implementation and where can districts find technical assistance resources?

School districts with an approved program are ready to implement the program *as it is written*. An approved AC program is aligned with the [AC Proposal Template](#) and provides information about how an approved program addresses the following required components: recruitment, eligibility/qualifications of candidates, enrollment, partner roles and responsibilities, program of study, support and observation, timelines, evaluations and recommending candidates for licensure. The [Technical Assistance Webinar PowerPoint](#) is posted on the West Virginia Department of Education web site as a resource for districts/RESAs.

As school districts become well informed about their specific AC program of study, AC partners and support staff should refer to their program's description of the following required steps as implementation of the program unfolds:

- a. Determine shortages of certified teachers: Positions are posted at least twice (total of 10 days) and no certified applicants have applied for the position.
- b. Recruit candidates and determine their eligibility/qualifications.
- c. Consider candidate qualifications for the specific endorsement sought and confirm the correlation of their documented qualifications with the position/subject area of the teacher shortage.
- d. Communicate the AC process with candidates: timelines, employment and program of study factors, and *make a formal offer of employment to the selected candidates for the posted positions*.
- e. Assist selected candidates with making application to the WVDE for an *Alternative Teaching Certificate* - [Form 25](#).
- f. Enroll recipients of the *Alternative Teaching Certificate* into the school district's state-approved alternative certification program of study.
- g. Compile and train the Professional Support Team.

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- h. Provide intensive & effective support to participants; observe and evaluate AC participants. The Professional Support Team must document progress of AC participants.

11. What endorsements may be included in an AC program of study and lead to candidate licensure?

The general education and special education endorsements identified in Appendix A of WVBE Policy 5202 (except for endorsements requiring a master's degree) are eligible to be addressed in the AC program of study. All endorsements recommended for grades 5-9 *must have an accompanying endorsement* recommendation in order to be approved for the alternative teaching certificate.

12. Training of the professional support team is required, but does this training need to be completed by WVCPD?

The state code provides guidance in 18A-3-1c, section c "...an alternative program's professional support team may be trained by and in coordination with the Center for Professional Development."

13. May a school district request both multi-categorical and autism endorsements if the individual is being employed for a vacancy that requires multi-categorical with autism?

Yes. The AC program of study must provide content for both endorsement areas to prepare AC candidates for the specific, required assessment(s) in addition to required special education topics. A description must be provided to the WVDE of the content coursework/professional development provided in both endorsement areas to be included in the district's approved AC program of study on file at the West Virginia Department of Education.

14. When may participants on an Alternative Teaching Certificate apply for initial licensure?

Individuals who possess an Alternative Teaching Certificate may apply for an initial Professional Teaching Certificate upon meeting the following requirements:

- a. Successful completion of the approved AC program of study and maintained an overall cumulative GPA of 2.5 or above for all coursework attempted
- b. Present passing scores on all WVBE required Praxis exams
- c. Receive an "approved" recommendation on the Comprehensive Evaluation Report
- d. Acceptable summative rating on the WV teacher evaluation report

A summative rating on the WV teacher evaluation report is required, so often a year of teaching experience must occur before AC candidates qualify for the initial Professional Teaching Certificate.

15. May the Alternative Teaching certificate be renewed?

Yes, if the AC candidate is making satisfactory progress, the Alternative Teaching Certificate may be renewed on an annual basis, a total of two times (within a 3 year period).

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**When considering individuals for an endorsement for which there is no WVBE-required assessment, i.e. *Deaf and Hard of Hearing*, it is important for the school district to examine the individual's academic transcript and/or documented occupational experiences/qualifications (that can be documented on a V-10). Reviewing a candidate's qualifications/fundamental experiences upon enrollment will assist in predicting and ensuring that AC candidates possess both the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful in the classroom.