



## New law opens easier road to getting teaching certificate

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ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

08/28/2008



AUGUST 27, 2008 - Teacher Phil Moran collects an in-class assignment during a journalism class at Bishop

Phil Moran, a refugee from the struggling mortgage business, is using his bad fortune to his advantage. He and more than 350 others in Missouri have signed up with a new program that will help them switch careers to become teachers.

A state law taking effect today allows mid-career professionals to become certified to teach under the alternative program called ABCTE, or the American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence.

After Moran lost his job when his company closed, he began substitute teaching at Bishop DuBourg High School, where his wife Laurie is a guidance counselor.

"I liked getting the light to go on in these kids' heads," he said.

Prospective teachers in Missouri have been especially enthusiastic, says Bonnie Zuckerman, director of teacher recruitment for ABCTE, a non-profit group based in Washington. "It's been our biggest launch in a state so far," she said.

Missouri is the eighth state to recognize the program, a process that required the passage of legislation to alter the state's teacher certification requirements. The law is designed to boost applicants for teacher positions, particularly in hard-to-fill math and science specialties.

But critics fear it could rush people into classrooms who have little training in teaching theory or classroom management.



## Children's Education Alliance of Missouri

Potential teachers in Missouri must pay \$850 to enroll in the program, which is completed mostly online. They must also complete 60 hours in the classroom and 30 hours of professional development, undergo a teaching evaluation and participate in mentoring programs. They then have to take exams on teaching knowledge and their subject matter at a testing center. Completing the program takes an average of eight months. The process qualifies participants for a state teaching certificate, but it's up to districts to decide whether to hire the prospective teachers.

Already, school districts say they're open to hiring such candidates.

"We intend to recognize teacher candidates with ABCTE certification as we would any other certified teacher candidate," said Kelvin McMillin, who oversees human resources for the Rockwood district. "Our selection and hiring process focuses upon finding the most talented teacher for our classroom openings."

So far, the district hasn't received any job inquiries from the program's participants, nor has it fielded requests from participants to fulfill their classroom training hours at Rockwood.

The program's administrators say 85 percent of its teachers are in the classroom three years after getting their certification. It issued its 1,000th certificate last month. The group said that 95 percent of the principals it surveyed found ABCTE-certified teachers to be as effective or more effective than its traditionally certified peers.

Critics, such as the National Education Association, say states such as Missouri already have programs in place to certify mid-career professionals. They say the new process does not require traditional coursework or teaching experience.

Otto Fajen of the Missouri NEA calls the program a "quick and dirty way" to address teacher quality and shortages, and he wonders how long these teachers will last in the classroom.

"It may be appealing to people on the front end, because the investment is low, but in terms of the survival rate, we're still concerned that their persistence may be less," he said. "And that's not good for them or the kids."

Still, aspiring teachers are happy the program helps them through the classroom door more quickly.

"I'm thrilled about anything that can keep me away from driving to a bunch of night classes," said Moran, of Manchester. "I'm a pretty skeptical person. I'm usually wary of fly-by-night things, and this is not that at all."

Moran and more than 500 others showed up at one of several of the program's recruitment events held earlier this month in St. Louis and around the state. Several who showed up at an event in Shrewsbury said they did not want to give their names to a reporter because their employers didn't know they were considering a career switch. They included a company vice president, a lawyer, and a worker "in the brewing industry."

The lawyer, a young woman who wants to teach English or History, said the program makes financial sense. "I looked at all the loans I have from law school," she said. "I can't go back to school."

Jeff Barnes, who owns his own pest control business in Farmington, said he'd manage his business on the side while he teaches, possibly in biology.

"I didn't think this was a possibility once I completed my degree," he said. "If you want to go into teaching you usually have to know from the start."

Diego Navarro, 33, teaches at Ursuline Academy and was the first person in Missouri to complete the program, and can now apply for his teaching certificate under the new law. He studied for only three weeks this summer before passing the math certification test, but also credits his three years of experience in the private school classroom and his electrical engineering degree.

"I think it's great for folks who want to teach and want to try it and not necessarily spend two years getting their certification just to see if it's a good fit for them," he said.