

We are learning more every day about the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). While the 2016-2017 school year is a transition year for developing the state's ESSA plan, the ADE has already begun conversations with stakeholders as a part of the planning process for the future. We are collaborating to create long-term plans for Arkansas's education system, but there are some provisions of ESSA that have immediate impact.

Under ESSA school districts and states are responsible for improving the quality and effectiveness of teachers. ESSA eliminates the HQT provision of NCLB, but replaces it with the following. The state must:

- Identify disparities of low income and minority students being disproportionately taught by ineffective, inexperienced, unqualified, or out-of-field teachers, principals or other school leaders;
- Have a mechanism to address these disparities;
- Describe the measures they will use to evaluate and publicly report on this requirement

There are currently three situations for which Arkansas would previously have relied on HQT requirements to provide the identification and the mechanism for addressing the ESSA provisions:

1. Arkansas charter schools, schools of innovation, and now school districts under Act 1240 (2015) may seek a waiver of licensure requirements. Without the HQT requirements, where licensure is waived there are no state minimum qualifications or standards for teachers.
2. Arkansas requires teachers in Alternative Learning Environments (ALE) to demonstrate content expertise in the assigned teaching area. Teachers in Alternative Education must be licensed and also have experience, knowledge, and participate with similar content educators to remain effectively informed and accurate concerning content delivery. Alternative Educators may demonstrate content knowledge for single or multi-subject areas.
3. In order to submit an approvable application for special education federal funding for the 2016-17 school year, Arkansas has to include as a part of its required annual assurances a statement about the qualifications for special education teachers. The state has the option to provide an assurance that all special education teachers will continue to meet former highly qualified requirements for core academic areas. If the state chooses NOT to do so, the state must submit a separate assurance that each person employed as a special education teacher has obtained full state certification/licensure.

To ensure that Arkansas maintains standards for teacher quality, the state will maximize this opportunity to create an Arkansas plan for qualified teachers where current licensure requirements might not apply, and to comply with state and federal legislation and rules.

The Department has worked with several stakeholders during the past few months to draft new *Arkansas Qualified Teacher* (AQT) rules. These rules will be presented to the State Board of Education on May 12 for adoption as emergency rules and also for public comment. These rules will seek to maintain standards for quality teachers for situations described above while providing new flexibility for schools to hire effective teachers. The AQT rules will impact fewer teachers as compared to HQT regulations as Arkansas licensure requirements already ensure teachers have a degree, are prepared, and can demonstrate content knowledge and pedagogical skills.

While the goals of HQT were to ensure teacher quality, the reality was often that HQT burdened districts with paperwork, additional reporting requirements, and barriers to employing teachers. Therefore, these rules are designed to greatly reduce paperwork for districts, streamline reporting requirements and provide flexibility for those seeking AQT status that may not have been eligible under prior rules. The rules will be Arkansas rules, instead of rules from the former federal requirements. A copy of the rules to be presented can be found here: <http://edboard.arkansas.gov/ItemAttachments.aspx?itemid=4888&meetingid=286>

**It is important to note that the AQT rules will only apply for core academic areas:**

- **when a school/district has a waiver from licensure (charter schools, schools of innovation, or Act 1240 schools)**
- **for special education teachers or ALE teachers**

Under the AQT rules, non-licensed educators, educators teaching in an ALE or Special Education educators will have several options to meet AQT . An educator who was previously highly qualified in one or more content areas will meet new AQT requirements under these rules. Among the new AQT provisions are additional options that were not previously available. (See section 3.02 of new rules).

As an option to section 3.02.2.3 of the rules, the Department will ask the State Board of Education to approve the use of a new K-12 Fundamental Subjects assessment as a content area qualification for AQT in Special Education, grades K-12 and ALE, grades K-8. If approved, licensed ALE educators and licensed Special Education educators would be qualified under AQT to teach multiple core subjects for their licensure level. This assessment would not be used for licensure endorsements or certifications but only for AQT in these circumstances. The Department plans to ask for the assessment approval in June.

Identification of AQT will be in eSchool with districts noting AQT status for teachers who are not licensed for the assigned areas of teaching. To assist with reporting and standard assurance reviews, districts will also be able to document teachers who have an approved ALP or are working as a long-term substitute. Documentation of AQT qualifications will be kept at the local level to be available as needed for reviews.

The following chart depicts the new eSchool fields for documentation of teachers assigned to courses for which they might not be licensed. eSchool identification will be only necessary for teachers assigned to courses for which they aren't licensed to teach or for those required to be AQT.

eSchool CODE	DESCRIPTION	STATE EQIV CODE (SIS)
NA	Not Applicable	NA
AQTCWL	Charter School Approval to Waive Licensure (but meets AQT requirements)	CWL
AQTAWL	Act 1240 Approval to Waive Licensure (but meets AQT requirements)	AWL
ALPTCH	Teacher is on an ALP	ALP
LTSTCH	Teacher is a Long-Term Sub	LTS
AQTSPED	Licensed Special Education and meets AQT for area teaching.	SPED
AQTALE	Licensed educator and meets AQT for area teaching.	ALE

In summary, during this transition period for ESSA implementation, the AQT rules will maintain quality standards for educators but add flexibility for the teachers of core subjects discussed in this memo.

Details regarding Highly Qualified Paraprofessionals will be forthcoming as the U.S. Department of Education completes the rule making process.

We have both short and long-term goals to address teacher effectiveness. The ADE will continue to work with educators, policymakers, and legislators during the 2017 legislative session, the subsequent rule-making process, and the development of the state's ESSA plan to improve opportunities for ensuring instructional quality for all students. We will continue to keep you updated during this process.