

**Regents Online Degree Teacher Education Program:
A Collaborative Approach to Addressing the Statewide Teacher Shortage**

-

Carol Helton, Tennessee Board of Regents
Coordinator of RODP Teacher Education
1415 Murfreesboro Road, Suite 372
Nashville, TN 37217-2833
(615) 366-3973
chelton@tbr.state.tn.us

Robbie Kendall-Melton, Tennessee Board of Regents
Associate Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs
1415 Murfreesboro Road, Suite 372
Nashville, TN 37217-2833
(615) 366-4445
rmelton@tbr.state.tn.us

Abstract

The State Board of Education, the Tennessee Department of Education, and the Tennessee Board of Regents have established a partnership to enhance P-12 education, to assure that "No Child in Tennessee is Left Behind", to prepare teachers for the 21st century technological age, and to address the shortage of teachers in the state of Tennessee. Using online technology, teachers are able to obtain additional endorsements in areas such as Science, Math, and Special Education, complete a Master's of Education Degree, continue their professional development, and participate in online mentoring activities.

Introduction

At a time when more is being expected of educators, Tennessee schools are experiencing major challenges regarding their teaching workforce. The first challenge is the current teacher shortage. According to the Tennessee Department of Education statistics, the current workforce includes approximately 57,000 teachers. In 2000-2001, the state hired 5,734 teachers. In that same year, Tennessee's public and private colleges graduated 3,750 students majoring in teacher education. With an annual turnover rate of 8%, the demand for teachers is rapidly exceeding the supply. (State Board of Education, 2003)

Another challenge relates to the growing number of teachers requiring waivers and permits. In 1997-1998, there were 424 teacher on waivers and 701 on permits. By the year 2001-2002 that number had doubled with 862 requiring waivers and 1755 teaching on permits. The latter number represented 4.3 % of teachers who were teaching outside their discipline/certification area. Clearly, these numbers are unacceptable when the state is striving for teachers to meet the "highly qualified" standards established in No Child Left Behind. (State Board of Education, 2003)

The quality of the current workforce is also a concern. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) awards national certification to teachers who successfully complete a rigorous evaluation process. Tennessee has incorporated NBPTS into its teacher licensure standards. As of November 2002, 65 of the 57,000 teachers in Tennessee had attained national board certification. One of the goals in Tennessee's master plans is to increase the number of NBPTS certified teachers. In addition, many of the paraprofessionals and teacher aides have not met the "highly qualified staff" requirements of No Child Left Behind. (State Board of Education, 2003)

To meet these challenges, the State Board of Education, the Tennessee Department of Education, and the Tennessee Board of Regents have established a partnership to enhance P-12 education, to assure that "No Child in Tennessee is Left Behind", prepare teachers for the 21st century technological age, and to address the shortage of teachers in the state of Tennessee. Through the Regents Online Degree Program (RODP) which uses online technology, teachers are able to obtain additional endorsements in areas such as Science, Math, and Special Education, complete a Master's of Education Degree, continue their professional development, and participate in online mentoring activities. Paraprofessional and teacher aids are able to earn an Associate of Science Degree in General Studies with an

emphasis in education.

Mission of Regents Online Degree Programs

The primary mission of the Regents Online Degree Programs (RODP) is to provide a better life for Tennesseans through education. RODP, using technology, improves access to high quality, affordable, student-centered learning opportunities through cooperation among its six TBR universities and thirteen community colleges. The six universities which include Austin Peay State University (APSU), East Tennessee State University, (ETSU), Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU), Tennessee State University (TSU), Tennessee Technological University (TTU), and The University of Memphis (UM) have collaborated with the Regents Online Degree Program to offer a Teacher Education Program that offers an online master degree program, add-on endorsements, and Alternative C licensure. The community colleges have collaborated to offer the Associate of Science in General Studies to current and potential paraprofessional/teacher aides. These community colleges include Chattanooga State Technical Community College, Cleveland State Community College, Cleveland State Community College, Dyersburg State Community College, Jackson State Community College, Motlow State Community College, Nashville State Technical Community College, Northeast State Technical Community College, Pellissippi State Technical Community College, Roane State Community College, Southwest State

Community College, Volunteer State Community College, and Walters State Community College.

Guiding Principles of Teacher Education Online Programs

Shall base ongoing assessment, planning, and decision making on reliable, broad-based data and stakeholders' input

Shall ensure academic integrity in the selection, development, and maintenance of the degree programs

Shall provide support for pedagogical and technological innovations and shall maximize economies of scale in configuring its programs

Shall provide collaborative delivery of educational programs to meet the learning needs of underserved populations

Shall pay priority attention to programs that provide collaborative delivery of needed educational services and meet statewide workforce needs

Shall use educational technology, innovation, and teaching strategies that produce the most learning by engaging students actively, collaboratively with other students, and in frequent contact with faculty.

Shall be accountable for performance excellence measured in terms of both satisfying stakeholders and meeting key performance indicators

Shall ensure quality and effectiveness in all aspects of the online learning delivery

Shall develop programs around demonstrable learning outcomes, assist the learner to achieve these outcomes, and assess learner progress by reference to these outcomes

Shall ensure high quality, comprehensive services to current and potential students

Types of Program Offerings

Master of Education

[Based on The National Board of Professional Teaching Standards: Early and Middle Childhood/Literacy: Reading—Language Arts]

The mission of this ROPD Master's Degree program in Education is to provide advanced professional preparation in the area of reading and language arts for practicing teachers. This program is based on the assumption that all participants will be fully licensed teachers who are currently teaching in Tennessee classrooms. Further, this program is based on the assumption that all courses will base course content and learning experiences on the student's work as a classroom teacher. All courses will include assignments that teachers will carry out in their own classrooms. The ROPD Master's Degree program is aligned with National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) core propositions. Further, the proposed program is built around a core of proficiencies that are consistent across most National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certificates. In addition, it includes coursework focused on pedagogical content proficiencies related to teaching Reading—Language Arts. This design will allow teachers to receive advanced professional preparation consistent with NBPTS principles and supportive of achieving NBPTS certification in Early and Middle Childhood/Literacy:

Reading—Language Arts. Since the core is aligned with NBPTS generalist certificates, this program will also support teachers who seek NBPTS certification in any of the generalist areas as well. This design is flexible in that it allows other NBPTS certification areas to be included by changing the pedagogical content focus.

Program Evaluation

The Schools of Education coordinate the evaluation of the program. These evaluations are conducted by external reviews, number of teacher obtaining NBPTS certification, alumni surveys, and P-12 employer surveys. Beyond the standards for measuring the effectiveness and success of the program as noted for SACS and NCATE, the following additional evaluation and assessment activities are implemented:

An "internal" quality control plan utilizing an MOE Assessment Subcommittee of the RODP Curriculum Evaluation & Assessment Committee (two representatives from each university and an external consultant from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards NBPTS) will assess the program and curriculum twice a year. In addition, the deans of education and the MOE committee agreed that the assessments used in courses during the program would "mirror" the assessments used by candidates applying for NBPTS certification.

Impact

It is estimated (based on projected enrollment data) that by the year 2005-2006 (the due date for ensuring qualified educators for *No Child Left Behind*) that these online offerings will produce 50 to 60 trained teachers each year.

Add-On Online Endorsements:

The Add-on Endorsements Online Program is designed to assist those certified teachers who are currently teaching outside their discipline/subject certification area in completing the certification required for their current teaching position. The add-on endorsements include:

- Special Education
- English as a Second Language
- Math
- Chemistry
- Biology

Alternative C. Licensure Program

The major purpose of this program is to prepare eligible participants to become effective math and science teachers in high-need schools as quickly as possible. The program requires a reduced number of course hours and instruction delivered in a modular manner. In addition, it requires a full year internship instead of enhanced student teaching where the candidate serves as the teacher of record. There is a paid teacher mentor on site and online for each participant

Occupational Licensure Program:

The Occupational Licensure Program provides coursework for the Health Science and Technology Educator and the Trade and Industry Educator. The successful completion of the six education courses included in this curriculum will allow educators teaching with an Apprentice License to advance to the next level which is the Professional Occupational Teaching License.

Associate of Science in General Studies

This program provides current and potential paraprofessionals and teacher aides the opportunity to complete the necessary requirements of the "highly qualified staff" in No Child Left Behind. Individuals are able to complete their entire associate degree or simply take additional courses online while continuing their services to the schools and communities.

Conclusion

The Regents Online Degree Program is committed to assisting the state of Tennessee in meeting the challenges regarding the teacher workforce. Through the collaborative effort of the six Tennessee Board of Regents universities and the thirteen community colleges, programs have been developed that consist of fully online courses offered in an interactive, asynchronous format. These courses consist of the same quality, content and rigor as similar courses offered on campus. The online format allows individuals throughout the state to continue their education while meeting their responsibilities with the schools in their communities.

Citations

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. <http://www.nbpts.org>

State Board of Education of Tennessee. *Master Plan for Tennessee Schools: Preparing for the 21st Century, 2003*. Retrieved October 10, 2003, from <http://www.state.tn.us/sbe/master.htm>

Tennessee Board of Regents Online Degree Program. <http://www.tn.regentsdegrees.org>

U. S. Department of Education: No Child Left Behind. <http://www.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml#>