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State's largest educator association disappointed in SBEC decision to maintain low GPA requirement

AUSTIN, Texas — At its meeting on Friday, Aug. 1, the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) voted against raising the minimum GPA requirement for entrance into an educator preparation program from 2.5 to 2.75. The board had taken initial action in May to raise the GPA requirement, responding to pressure from the Legislature and a specific request from the Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE). SBEC reversed course last week after some alternative certification programs (ACPs) opposed the higher standard. ATPE was the only group to testify in favor of the proposal.

“Case studies and research show that raising standards for entrance into the profession have a positive effect on teacher and student success,” Executive Director Gary Godsey said. “The world’s highest achieving education systems and even top-ranked educator preparation programs in Texas have entrance requirements more rigorous than what SBEC requires.”

ATPE has long advocated for raising standards for entrance into the profession in order to improve prestige and attract more qualified candidates to careers in teaching. ATPE believes making the profession more selective would better equip educators to demand meaningful change such as improved compensation.

Those testifying in opposition to raising the GPA requirement were private, for-profit programs that offer alternative certification, an expedited route to teaching using on-the-job training rather than traditional schooling methods. Some program representatives claimed that higher state standards would cause a 40 percent drop in their enrollment, which is higher than official estimates that the increased GPA requirement would affect only about 11 percent of candidates

statewide. ACPs already have the ability to waive the GPA requirement for up to 10 percent of their candidates each year.

“We support alternative routes to certification and are proud that a number of our successful members hail from ACPs,” Godsey said. “We also acknowledge the even greater need for appropriate GPA requirements for those individuals. They are placed in the classroom as full-time teachers almost immediately and before completing much of their training. ACPs have a duty to ensure that their candidates already have sufficient content knowledge and experience that will make them likely to succeed in such a stressful work environment. Otherwise, they are setting them up for failure.”

SBEC is up for sunset review in the upcoming legislative session. A 2012 Sunset Advisory Commission report recommended that the board be abolished and that standards for educator preparation programs and the profession be raised. The 2014 Sunset Commission report is expected later this year.

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The Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE) has been a strong voice for Texas educators since 1980. It is the leading educators' association in Texas with more than 100,000 members statewide. With its strong collaborative philosophy, ATPE speaks for classroom teachers, administrators, future, retired and para-educators and works to create better opportunities for 5 million public schoolchildren. ATPE is the ally and the voice of Texas public school education.