



# Smithville ISD

## Certification Delay of Teacher Certification Requirements Application

| Academic Year | DOI Restrictions  |
|---------------|---|
| 2025-2026     | District maintains currently approved DOI plan which may include exemptions from 21.003   |
| 2026-2027     | District can no longer include K-5 reading and mathematics teachers in DOI plan exemptions from 21.003  |
| 2027-2028     | District can no longer include all foundational subject teachers (i.e., reading/English language arts, math, science, and social studies) in any grade level in DOI plan exemptions from 21.003 |

### Justification & Rationale:

Smithville ISD currently employs 118 teachers (12 alternatively certified), with two unfilled teaching positions. Smithville ISD faces significant certification challenges due to geographic location and recruitment difficulties when competing with urban districts. The financial burden of additional certification is substantial for our teaching staff, and losing experienced teachers during this transition would severely disrupt educational continuity essential to our students' success. Granting this delay of certification requirements will allow our dedicated teachers time to complete certification requirements while continuing to serve our students effectively, preventing turnover in our community where every educator plays a critical role.

### Key Challenges:

- Rural location recruitment challenges
- Limited local access to certification programs
- Financial constraints for teachers pursuing additional certification
- Need to retain quality experienced teachers during transition
- Timeline needed for teachers to complete requirements

- Impact of teacher turnover on student continuity

**Educator Preparation Partner:** Teachworthy & Indiana Wesleyan University

### **Strategies to Address Certification Requirements:**

#### **1. Strategy 1: Phased Certification Completion & Teacher Support Program**

Annual Reduction Goals:

- Year 1 (2026-27): Reduce alternatively certified teachers from 10% to 7% (4 teachers achieving full certification)
- Year 2 (2027-28): Reduce to 4% (4 additional teachers certified)
- Year 3 (2028-29): Reduce to 2% or below (remaining teachers certified)

#### Priority Focus Areas by Subject/Grade Level:

Phase 1 Priority: Secondary STEM and Special Education (historically hardest to fill positions)

Phase 2 Priority: Elementary core subjects and Bilingual/ESL

Phase 3 Priority: Electives and supplemental positions

#### Teacher Support Initiatives:

- District-funded certification exam fees and study materials (estimated \$300 per teacher)
- Partnering with ESC Region 13 for online certification preparation courses
- Mentorship pairing: each alternatively certified teacher assigned to veteran certified teacher
- Release time for certification testing and coursework (2 professional development days per semester)
- Stipend incentive of \$1,000 upon successful certification completion via TEA as allowable
- Monthly cohort meetings share resources and progress

We will meet with two groups of uncertified teachers regarding this change in law to emphasize

the urgency of this change. The following assumes our plan is either not approved by the SISD

School Board or TEA. We do not want to have to let any teachers go as a result of this law; however, it is a possibility pending approval of the plan mentioned above. It is only fair that

teachers are aware of this and work urgently toward completing their certification requirements this school year.

- The Prek-5th-grade (reading and math) group is the most urgent; they have one year to obtain certification, or they will be eligible to apply for an open secondary position if available. If there are no open positions posted at the time of teacher contract renewal, this group would not be receiving a contract.
- The second group has until the end of the 2027 school year to get certified, and it includes PreK-5th-grade science and social studies teachers in addition to all secondary teachers who teach reading, math, science, or social studies. This group would be eligible to apply for any open position in CTE, Fine Arts, or PE. If there are no open positions posted at the time of teacher contract renewal, this group would not be receiving an extension.

## 2. Strategy 2 Grow-Your-Own & Regional Recruitment Pipeline

### Future Pipeline Development:

- Educational Aide to Teacher Program: Identify 3-5 current paraprofessionals annually interested in teaching careers; provide tuition assistance and mentorship through alternative certification programs
- Smithville High School Partnership: Create "Future Educators" pathway course; offer dual credit education courses through partnership with local community colleges

### Regional Recruitment Strategies:

- Establish partnerships with Bastrop County and surrounding districts for shared alternative certification cohorts (reducing per-district costs)
- Competitive incentive package for newly certified teachers: signing bonus (\$3,000), housing assistance information for relocating teachers, and student loan repayment support (\$500/year for 5 years)
- Virtual job fairs targeting career changers in Austin metro area (45 minutes from Smithville) highlighting rural teaching benefits and lower cost of living

### Long-term Sustainability:

- Summer para-educator academy for high school students interested in education careers

- Formalized onboarding and retention program to reduce turnover: first-year teacher support team, new teacher orientation, and 3-year mentorship commitment

#### **Success Metrics:**

1. 90% retention rate for alternatively certified teachers completing certification
2. At least 2 "grow-your-own" candidates entering teaching pipeline annually by Year 2
3. Reduction in time-to-fill vacancies from average 90 days to 60 days by Year 3

#### **Compliance Timeline:**

- Proposed delay period-2 years
- Milestone dates for teacher certification progress
- Target completion date for full compliance
- Quarterly progress reporting plan

#### **Community Engagement & Transparency**

##### **School Board Meetings:**

- January 2026:
  - a. Inform board of intent for application.
  - b. Post to the district website notice of intent for application.
- February 23, 2026: Board votes on approval of application.
- March/April 2026: Report on commissioner's decision

Date of Board Approval: TBD