

Credentialing school leaders in Michigan:

It's Not Your Grandfather's Oldsmobile

By Pat Reeves

Well, it's back. School Administrators will, again, have the opportunity to earn a set of credentials that certify their preparation and qualification for leadership roles in Michigan's K-12 schools. After more than a ten-year lapse, K-12 Administration Certificates and Endorsements will be issued through the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) based on standards for school leadership recommended by the field and adopted by the State Board of Education. While the new Administrative Certification program is voluntary, it provides a means for school leaders to qualify themselves for the important work of leading Michigan's schools. Plus, it offers the districts that employ school leaders a means for distinguishing between candidates.

What's old?

As with the previous school administration certification program, repealed in 1994, school leaders start by earning a basic administrative certificate through MDE-approved university graduate degree work, primarily through a masters degree in school administration. This basic certificate can be augmented with one of three earned basic endorsements: Elementary Principal, Secondary Principal, and/or Central Office. Again, these extra endorsements are earned through MDE-approved university graduate work.

Unfortunately, the new voluntary certification program is only available to school administrators who are in principal and central office roles that deal primarily with the instructional program. This leaves out school business officials and other administrator specialties that deal with non-instructional areas of responsibility.

So far the new program sounds very much like the one we lost in the nineties. But hold on. There are some major differences that make Michigan's new credentialing program for school leaders both fundamentally different from the repealed version and unique among the state school administrator credentialing systems in the U.S.

What's new?

The new twist is the provision for additional specialty endorsements and enhancements to the basic credentials. School leaders can earn these through MDE-approved programs sponsored by their professional associations, i.e. MASA, MEMSPA, MASSP, MASCD. Professional associations are qualified to submit credentialing programs for MDE and State Board approval if they have been in operation for at least ten years and have a state-wide membership base of school administrators who qualify for certification under the new law.

So what is a specialty endorsement?

The new law leaves the administrator open to the needs of the field. The professional associations representing principals, curriculum and instruction directors and superintendents can work with their memberships to identify specialty focus areas that would expand their members' credentials and offer added value for their employing school districts. These could include such areas as literacy, early childhood, vocational, instructional technology, school improvement, and, yes, the superintendency. The potential is open for responding to the need for specific expertise and skill in targeted areas of school administration related to the educational program.

So what is a specialty enhancement?

What really makes Michigan's new Administrator Certification and Endorsement Program unique is the opportunity to earn a State recognized **enhancement** to the certificate and endorsements. An enhancement, again earned through a professional association, offers the opportunity for school leaders to extend themselves in a professional practice and learning program where they demonstrate their knowledge, skill, and performance against deepened or heightened standards of practice. This new provision gives formal recognition to school leaders who want to take their practice to the next level and are willing to engage in special programs to do so.

The Michigan Department of Education is currently working with a task force of individuals from the State professional associations and universities, to develop the details and the process for implementation of Michigan's new K-12 Administrator Certification, Endorsement, and Enhancement Program.

This group began their work over a year before the final passage of the enabling legislation and will continue to move forward to set up the necessary structures, rules, and processes for full implementation.

In the meantime, MASA and the other involved professional associations will work together to keep our members apprised of developments and opportunities. See related article on page 9.