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People who were not trained to be teachers but have at least five years of work experience could get approval to teach high school in shortage areas such as math and science under a proposed new state rule.

"This is a last-minute, emergency-type situation. This is not what we would consider normal procedure," George Maurer, executive director of the Iowa Board of Educational Examiners (which handles teacher licensure), told a panel of lawmakers.

But the idea was blasted Tuesday by the state teachers' union, which said the move would substantially lower standards for teachers who must understand how youth learn, how to manage a classroom, and how to put together a lesson.

"It is a significant departure from the expectations that we have had for licensed teachers that we have put in front of our public-school children here in the state of Iowa," said Christy Hickman, staff counsel of the Iowa State Education Association (ISEA), which represents more than 34,000 educators. "This is going to be the first time that we are allowing non-educators to teach very high-level courses to our kids. ... They shouldn't have to be guinea pigs for three years."

The rule proposed by the Iowa Board of Educational Examiners received an initial review

Tuesday by the legislature's Administrative Rules Review Committee. Under the rule, school districts that have unsuccessfully tried to hire a fully licensed teacher instead can hire someone with experience working in math, chemistry, physics, biology, foreign language, or music.

Permission to teach would last for three years, during which the person must take classes in teaching methods, classroom management, ethics, and diversity training. The person would be supervised by the principal and involved in a mentoring program.

State Senator Thomas Courtney (D-Burlington) sharply criticized the Iowa Board of Educational Examiners.

"It seems you guys are over-reaching a ton," Courtney told Maurer. "It seems to me that's [the legislature's job] and not yours. I don't think it's your department that should be making these decisions. I think it's much more than rule; I think it's legislation. ... And I think we're looking for higher-quality teachers, not lower-quality teachers. ... I think we're lowering standards in Iowa."

Maurer said that in a perfect world, he wouldn't be proposing this. But the reality is the state has been trying to deal with these shortage areas in teaching for multiple years, and the situation isn't improving.

Burlington schools Superintendent Jane Evans said her district struggled this past summer to find two math teachers for Burlington High School. Teachers finally were hired the first week of August, just weeks before school started August 18.

"It's extremely difficult to find high-school math and science teachers," Evans said. "Unless something is done to recruit more teachers to become ... math and science secondary teachers, I would be interested in seeing what could be done to get qualified businesspeople trained, so they can be teachers in high school."

But Evans said she can understand why the teachers' union would be concerned.

"They might see it as taking away work that they have trained for," she said. "Even ISEA has to realize that there are shortage areas and that something has to be done."

Courtney said teaching is an area where professionals are needed.

"If I were going to get on an airplane and they said, 'You know, we couldn't find a real pilot, but we've got someone back here that's flown some,' I'd say, 'Wait a minute. Maybe I'll take a different flight,'" Courtney said. "You just don't do this."

Mary Jane Cobb, executive director of the ISEA, said people with "content experience" can know *what* to teach but may not know *how* to teach. She said the union would prefer the current "teacher intern license," which requires at least some coursework in pedagogy before a person can teach.

"We have to look out what's best for the students and having the right teacher in front of the classroom ... ," Cobb said. "In order to be in front of a classroom of students, you need to have some skills. ...We want that of our physicians. We want that of our accountants. We want that of our attorneys."

Maurer estimated that five to 10 people a year would qualify to teach under the proposed rule, called a "preliminary professional career authorization." He acknowledged that it would allow Iowa schools to put people into the classroom with very little preparation.

But state Senator Merlin Bartz (R-Grafton) pointed to how this might allow a school district in a pinch to find a high-school music teacher. Giving himself as an example, Bartz said he has a bachelor-of-arts degree in music composition, has 20 years of experience directing community choirs, and can teach at the college level.

"I don't think that we can necessarily classify this as a substantially lower standard. I think you might be able to make the case that it's a different standard," Bartz said. "I can understand that it might not be a preferred standard. But I think if we're only dealing with five or 10 of these a year, I don't think it necessarily implies a non-professional standard."

Evans predicted that results will vary.

"Some businessperson, maybe a retired businessperson who loves kids and knows how to relate, they might do a fantastic job," she said. "For another person, they might not be able to engage."

The fate of the rule now is back in the hands of the Iowa Board of Educational Examiners, which meets October 7 and can decide to formally adopt the rule, change it, or scrap it after Tuesday's "decidedly chilly reception," said Joe Royce, a lawyer who coordinates the Administrative Rules Review Committee. If the rule is adopted, it will be back before the committee in the next few months and could take effect as early as Decemer 7.

The Administrative Rules Review Committee took no formal action Tuesday on the proposed rule. However, Iowa Senate President Jack Kibbie (D-Emmetsburg) suggested that if lawmakers see the rule again, a "session delay" would be put on the rule, meaning that it will be put on hold until the legislature has a chance to review it next year.

"Maybe this is the route to get this issue before the legislature," Kibbie said.

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