

Education

Legislator proposes new credentials for dance, theater teachers

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State Senator Ben Allen introduces a bill to create stand alone public school credentials for dance and theater teachers. **LORIE LEILANI SHELLEY/COURTESY SEN. ALLEN**

In an effort to increase the number of public schools offering theater and dance classes and to lure more dance and theater professionals to teaching, Santa Monica-area State Senator Ben Allen [unveiled a bill](#) on Wednesday to create, for the first time, teaching credentials in those subjects.

“Our message today is that we recognize the specialized training needed for dance and theater, that we value it, like we value these disciplines, like we value our teachers, our student, and our state,” said Allen, surrounded by half a dozen arts advocates at a Sacramento news conference.

Those supporters said the current teacher credentialing process – under which a teacher who wants to teach theater must earn a credential in English and a dance teacher must earn a physical education license – must change.

Requiring dance teachers to credential in physical education puts the focus of instruction on athleticism and skill building, said Nancy Ng, a past president of the [California Dance Education Association](#). But “dance as art focuses on creativity, problem solving, and the communication of new ideas, all attributes California kids need as global citizens,” she said.

Moreover, Ng said that California's system is leading many people who've studied theater and dance to go to other states to earn stand-alone credentials in those subjects, and many stay in those states to teach.

The bill, if passed, would direct the California [Commission on Teacher Credentialing](#) to begin a process to convene experts in those fields to draw up a new credentialing process and to get feedback from teacher education programs and school districts. The bill would allow current dance and theater teachers to continue teaching those subjects.

It could take the commission “at least about a year and a half, from start to finish,” to create the new teaching credentials said the commission's Legislative Representative Joshua Speaks.

There's one big unknown that'll determine the bill's success: “How much demand would there be, [and] what is the job market for teachers” who earn a dance or theater credential, said Cal State Fullerton College of Education Dean Claire Cavallaro.

Cavallaro's program, one of the biggest teacher programs in the California State University system, would likely adopt the credential program, she said, with a few dozen students to start. But that wouldn't happen for at least two years if the state bill passes in this legislative session, she said.

Statewide, less than 20 percent of public school students have access to dance or theater classes, arts advocates said at the announcement.

“We are looking for new teachers in all the disciplines in the division of performing arts,” said L.A. Unified dance teacher Ginger Rose Fox, who is also on the

California Teachers Association arts caucus.

“However, it’s been very difficult for the district to find teachers that are highly qualified in dance and theater because they haven’t been trained,” she said.

Advocates have long tried and failed to create stand-alone credentials for dance and theater. They're hoping public schools' gradual increased focus on arts education in recent years helps them this time around.

A previous version of this story misspelled Claire Cavallaro's last name. KPCC regrets the error.