

Oral Testimony of Shonterrio Harris
Teacher at Avondale Meadows Academy
Before the Indiana Senate Committee on Education
In Support of Senate Bill 387
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My name is Shonterrio Harris and I am a third year elementary school teacher here in Indianapolis. I've taught 4th grade for two years in Indianapolis Public Schools and I currently teach at Avondale Meadows Academy. My endeavors to earn my teacher's license have been nothing short of a cake walk, as I have been attempting the licensure examinations for the past 2.5 years and have yet to be successful in passing all of them.

Upon graduating from Wake Forest University, I decided I wanted to become an educator because I was inspired by the numerous teachers who invested in me. As a first generation college student, I wanted to give back and help others who came from similar communities as me. So I joined Teach for America and was placed in Indianapolis to be an elementary teacher.

In the state Indiana, if you are not a traditionally trained educator, you must apply for a transitional license and enroll in a graduate teacher preparation program. One must pass the Core Academic Skills Assessment (CASA) or meet one of the alternative requirements to gain admission to one of this programs.

The CASA exam can only be taken in the state of Indiana, so my senior year of college I had to figure out how to fly out from North Carolina to Indianapolis to take the exam. I passed both the Reading and Writing sections, but not the Math section and would have to wait at least 30 days before I could attempt it again. I knew that I realistically would not be able to do this until after I had moved to Indiana.

I had secured a job teaching 4th grade at Ralph Waldo Emerson School 58. The day before I moved from Memphis to Indianapolis, I found out that I was in jeopardy of losing my job before I even started because I failed the Math CASA exam. As a new college graduate I was terrified because I was moving to new city by myself and I had just signed my first lease only to meet with the possibility that I might unemployed when I arrived. Thankfully, I was able to pass it during my second attempt and was able move forward with TFA and IPS.

Then my struggles with the content area exams began. In order to be considered a highly qualified elementary teacher and receive your teaching license in the state of Indiana, you must pass all of the examinations within the Elementary Generalist tract. This consists of 4 subject based sub-tests and a pedagogy exam. The subtests are \$45 each and the pedagogy exam is \$115. After multiple attempts, I've passed the Reading, Science, and Social Studies exams. I even passed the pedagogy exam on my first attempt.

However, the one test I have struggled with the most is the mathematics exam. I have attempted this exam a total of ten times and I keep missing the minimum passing score by only five points.

This exam is the only thing standing in between me and license. I feel that my longevity as an educator in the state of Indiana is threatened because I haven't been able to pass this test. My difficulties with these exams are not an adequate representation of my ability to teach. During my time with IPS I was rated an effective teacher for both years I taught at School 58 and I have continued to receive strong evaluations at Avondale Meadows Academy. While being a full time teacher, I graduated from Marian University with a 4.0 GPA and my Master's Degree in Teaching.

I share my story in support of aspiring teachers receiving alternative pathways to licensure. However, while still in support of the SB 387, I urge the committee to continue to seek out solutions to this very pressing problem. In my personal experience, since Indiana transitioned from the Praxis to Pearson manufacturing the teacher exams, I have found that there are not enough materials on the market to adequately study for it. There have been two separate occasions in the local news reporting that there are several aspiring teachers failing these exams multiple times, despite excelling in their respective teacher preparation programs. The number of questions that you have to get correct to achieve the minimum passing score has been reduced because so many people are failing these exams.

There are so many factors that go into being an effective educator. I understand the desire to have a rigorous process in place to license educators to practice, however there is a teacher shortage in Indiana. By allowing examination and licensure policies to stand as is, it would further exacerbate the issue. Instructional skills can be taught. If you cannot effectively manage a classroom and build relationships with students, it does not matter how strong of a test taker you are, it will be nearly impossible to execute instruction. Despite my struggles with these exams, a majority of the scholars I have worked with over the past 2.5 years have achieved exponential growth in both reading and mathematics. There are so many aspiring teachers that want to help Hoosier children who are being kept out of the classroom. There are several current educators who fear for the stability of their careers because of these examinations. I truly hope that you take my comments into consideration as you continue to move forward with evaluating how teachers can become licensed in Indiana. I'll be happy to answer any questions.