

## **Integrating Kindergarten into the Elementary Education Endorsement Grade Band: Upcoming Changes**

In response to district concerns related to difficulty assigning properly licensed teachers to kindergarten positions, the Illinois State Board of Education will provide a process beginning for the 2025-26 school year through which an educator can expand the grade range of the Elementary Education endorsement from Grades 1 through 6 to kindergarten through Grade 6.

This change can provide districts with a larger pool of qualified applicants, which could reduce district reliance on substitute teachers or other means of temporarily assigning teachers.

What follows includes information about this change for educators, districts, and institutions of higher education faculty.

### ***Institutions of Higher Education***

#### **1. Do ISBE-approved educator preparation programs (EPPs) currently recognized to offer a program(s) leading to the receipt of an Elementary Education (1-6) endorsement on a Professional Educator License (PEL) need to resubmit standards-aligned elementary education programs approved by the State Educator Preparation and Licensure Board?**

Each institution must notify ISBE of its status to either:

- State that changes to its elementary education program are needed to include kindergarten; or
- Confirm that the currently approved program already aligns with the kindergarten through Grade 6 grade band.

Institutions should submit this notification using the [EPP Elementary Education – Grade Range Expansion Verification Microsoft Form](#) provided by ISBE. The completed form must be submitted by December 1, 2025. ISBE will communicate receipt of the form and support institutions, as needed, in the alignment process to be completed by February 1, 2029.

Depending upon the scope of changes, an EPP must submit a [New Program Proposal](#) Form when it plans modifications to its state-approved program that will result in 50% or more of the course content changing. The EPP can use the [Program Change Form](#) if less than half of its program changes.

#### **2. When can institutions begin entitling candidates under the new K–6 Elementary Education endorsement grade band?**

Institutions may begin entitling candidates for the K–6 endorsement after the Illinois Administrative Code is updated to reflect the expanded grade band (anticipated by July 1, 2026), and one of the following conditions is met:

- The institution has submitted a notification to ISBE by December 1, 2025, indicating no changes are needed to its current elementary education program; or

- The institution has submitted changes to ISBE and received approval by February 1, 2029.

### **3. Can an institution entitle candidates for a short-term kindergarten approval in the interim?**

Candidates who are entitled for the elementary education (1-6) grade range may apply for a short-term approval for kindergarten in their Educator Licensure Information System (ELIS) accounts or may be entitled for the approval by their EPP before the K-6 grade range is finalized in rule and prior to an EPP submitting documentation to ISBE. The approval application fee is \$50, and the approval is valid for three years. It will be awarded to any educator who holds a 1-6 Elementary Education endorsement.

### **4. Will presentation materials and surveys be shared with institutions?**

Yes. Presentation slides and additional resources are available on the ISBE [Elementary Education -- New Grade Range is Coming Soon](#) webpage. There also will be a webinar, [Integrating Kindergarten into the Elementary Education Endorsement Grade Band: Upcoming Changes and Timelines](#), hosted by ISBE at 10 a.m. on June 24.

### ***Districts***

#### **5. How can an educator obtain the short-term kindergarten approval?**

Educators who currently hold a PEL with an Elementary Education (1-6) endorsement may apply for a short-term kindergarten approval through ELIS beginning July 1, 2025.

This approval:

- Is valid for three years.
- Allows the educator to serve as the teacher of record in kindergarten.
- Does not require additional coursework or testing.

This short-term approval provides immediate flexibility for kindergarten assignments while the full K–6 endorsement is anticipated to be ready by July 1, 2026. The application fee is \$50.

#### **6. What steps should educators with short-term kindergarten approvals take to ensure uninterrupted assignability?**

Educators who receive a short-term approval for kindergarten will not need to take immediate action.

This approval:

- Is valid for three years.
- Allows the educator to serve as the teacher of record in kindergarten.
- Requires no additional coursework or testing.

Once the K–6 endorsement becomes available in ELIS (anticipated by July 1, 2026), educators holding the short-term approval may apply for the K–6 endorsement in their ELIS account. Educators should apply for this endorsement before their short-term approval expires if they plan to continue teaching kindergarten.