Alabama State Department of Education  
Division of Teaching and Learning  
Teaching and Leading  
Educator Certification  

Working Document

The Office of Teaching and Leading, Educator Certification, is responsible for ensuring that academic requirements for certification approaches are met, background clearance requirements for professional and support staff are satisfied, and that all test requirements are met for issuance of certificates. This office also grants highly qualified teacher (HQT) status based on federal guidelines and provides information on acceptable professional development.

Educator/Leadership Certification

Act 2015-3, Section 9(e)(1)

Public charter schools shall comply with applicable federal laws, rules, and regulations regarding the qualification of teachers and other instructional staff. In accordance with subsection (a), teachers in public charter schools shall be exempt from state teacher certification requirements.

- Approaches to earning Alabama Educator and/or Leadership Certification for individuals working in conversion public charter schools or start-up public charter schools are the same as those for individuals in the public local education agencies of Alabama.
- After approval of a public charter school, a certification specialist at the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) will be available to help the school’s human resource department to provide assistance with certification approaches and/or questions just as they do with local education agencies and registered private schools in Alabama.

Criminal History Background Checks

Act 2015-3, Section 9(d)(1)

Public charter schools shall be subject to the same civil rights, health, and safety requirements, including, but not limited to, state and local public health and building codes, employee fingerprinting and criminal background checks applicable to other public schools in the state, except as otherwise specifically provided in this act.

- See “Criminal History Background Check FAQs for Alabama Public Charter Schools” on the next page for information regarding background checks.

Notes

- For certification approaches and forms: go to the ALSDE Web site at www.alsde.edu/EdCert.
- For individuals wanting to e-mail questions: Click on the “Contact Us” button on the Web site listed in the previous bullet.
- For individuals wanting to call with questions: Educator Certification Telephone Number is 334-353-8567 (e-mails preferred).

WORKING DOCUMENT—8/26/15
Criminal History Background Check FAQs for Alabama Public Charter Schools

1. Why does the ALSDE require criminal history background checks?

   All applicants for employment who will have unsupervised access to children in any Alabama public charter school must complete an Alabama State Bureau of Investigation (ASBI) and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) criminal history background check through the ALSDE, consistent with the Alabama Child Protection Act of 1999, as amended, codified at Ala. Code §§16-22A-1 to -34 (1975). This is also required by Section 9(c)(1) of the Alabama School Choice and Student Opportunity Act (Act 2015-3).

2. Does an applicant who has already completed an Alabama State Bureau of Investigation and Federal Bureau of Investigation criminal history background check through the ALSDE need to be fingerprinted again for employment with an Alabama public charter school?

   No. Under current requirements, an applicant who has completed an Alabama State Bureau of Investigation and Federal Bureau of Investigation criminal history background check through the ALSDE and whose fingerprint results are on file with the ALSDE are not required to complete a new criminal history background check for employment purposes. An individual may verify that criminal history background check results are on file with the ALSDE by visiting the Educator Certification Portal at www.alsde.edu/EdCert (click “Background Clearance”). However, the public charter school may elect to do a new criminal history check on applicants for employment pursuant to Ala. Code §16-22A-5(a)(1975).

3. Are volunteers in Alabama public charter schools required to complete a criminal history background check?

   No. Volunteers are individuals who receive no compensation from Alabama public charter schools for services rendered. Volunteers are not required or even allowed to be fingerprinted by the ALSDE. However, Alabama public charter schools may require their own separate background check for volunteers. These criminal history background checks will be conducted without the resources of the ALSDE. The ALSDE conducts criminal history background checks pursuant to the Alabama Child Protection Act of 1999, as amended, codified at Ala. Code §§16-22A-1 to -34 (1975). This act addresses criminal history background checks for purposes of employment or educator certification; it does not authorize criminal history background checks for volunteers.

4. If an applicant has completed a criminal history background check in another state or by another state agency in Alabama, is the applicant required to be fingerprinted again?

   Yes. An applicant must complete an Alabama State Bureau of Investigation and Federal Bureau of Investigation criminal history background check through the ALSDE. A criminal history background check submitted from the United States military; the Department of Human Resources; federal, state, and local law enforcement; or other agencies is not accepted.

5. How do I register and pay for fingerprinting?

   3M Cogent Systems is the sole vendor, currently, authorized to conduct fingerprinting for the ALSDE. Applicants living in Alabama should follow the instructions regarding the fingerprinting process through 3M Cogent Systems at https://www.cogentid.com/al/index_adeNew.htm or by calling (866) 989-9316 (toll free). The current cost of fingerprinting for Alabama residents is $49.65. A list of
fingerprint locations established in Alabama can be found on the 3M Cogent Systems Web site for Alabama at https://www.cogentid.com/al/index_adeNew.htm under the “Print Site Locations” tab.

Applicants living outside of Alabama who are unable to report to a designated fingerprint site in Alabama should access the 3M Cogent Systems Web site to register online at https://www.cogentid.com/al/index_adeNew.htm. The applicant should contact the Educator Certification Section at (334) 353-8567 or e-mail edcert@alsde.edu to request two fingerprint cards. Once the fingerprint cards are received, the applicant should contact his/her local law enforcement agency to be fingerprinted. The applicant should send one completed fingerprint card and a money order or cashier’s check in the amount of $57.65 made payable to 3M Cogent Systems to the following address: 3M Cogent Systems / 5025 Bradenton Ave. / Suite A / Dublin, OH 43017. The applicant should keep the second completed fingerprint card in the event a reprint notice is received from 3M Cogent Systems.

6. Is registration required prior to submitting fingerprints?

Yes. Registration is required before submitting fingerprints to the ALSDE. During fingerprint registration at the 3M Cogent Systems Web site, applicants will be asked to provide pertinent information regarding their reason for requesting a criminal history background check. It is imperative that applicants provide complete and accurate responses to all questions during registration. Failure to do so will result in a delay of processing the criminal history background check. Applicants seeking employment with an Alabama public charter school but not seeking Alabama certification or licensure should select “Employment in a classified position” as their “Application Type” and then select the Alabama public charter school where they are seeking employment. This will ensure that results of the criminal history background check are reported to the applicant and the correct Alabama public charter school or LEA.

7. Once fingerprints have been submitted to ALSDE through 3M Cogent Systems, how long will it take to receive the results of the background check?

Results of the criminal history background check will be reported to the ALSDE usually within 48 hours of initial processing. Do not contact 3M Cogent Systems or the fingerprint locations with questions regarding individual history background results. All inquiries should be addressed to the ALSDE, Educator Certification Section, at (334) 353-8567.

8. What can an applicant do to expedite the review of background check results?

Typically, fingerprint results are received 48 hours after fingerprint submission. In some cases, this will take longer. Before a review can be completed, the Educator Certification Section may need additional information. If an applicant has been convicted of a felony or misdemeanor, he or she should mail the following information to the ALSDE, Educator Certification Section, following the submission of his/her fingerprints to 3M Cogent Systems:

1. A court-certified copy of the case action summaries showing the judgments, convictions, and sentencing or other outcome of all charges.

2. A notarized personal explanation regarding the circumstances surrounding each case to include the dates involved, the places of conviction, and any other factors that should be considered.
The information listed above should be mailed to the address listed below:

Alabama State Department of Education  
Educator Certification Section  
P.O. Box 302101  
Montgomery, AL 36130-2101

9. **What should an applicant do if fingerprints results are rejected?**

In some cases, an applicant's fingerprints generate characteristics of poor quality causing the Alabama State Bureau of Investigation and Federal Bureau of Investigation to reject the submission. If the applicant's fingerprints are rejected due to poor quality, a letter will be generated and mailed to the applicant by 3M Cogent Systems. The applicant is required to take the letter (or the applicant's REGISTRATION ID) to any of the 3M Cogent Systems fingerprint locations in Alabama for the collection of a second set of fingerprints. If the applicant resides outside of Alabama and submitted fingerprint cards, the applicant will be required to submit a new set of fingerprint cards to 3M Cogent Systems, ALSDE Cards Scan, 5025 Bradenton Ave, Suite 100, Dublin, OH 43017. A new set of fingerprints received no later than 90 days after the first rejection will be processed at no additional cost to the applicant. If the applicant does not submit a new set of fingerprints within 90 days, the applicant must re-register, re-pay, and be fingerprinted again. If the second submission of the applicant's fingerprints is rejected due to the quality of the prints, the applicant will NOT receive a second rejection letter from 3M Cogent Systems. The ALSDE will be informed and will work with the Alabama State Bureau of Investigation, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and 3M Cogent Systems to provide a solution.

10. **What does the status “Pending” mean?**

“Pending” is a status commonly referenced on Alabama’s online Educator Certification Portal. “Pending” means that fingerprint results have been received but the review of the file has not been completed. The fingerprint applicant may contact the ALSDE, Educator Certification Section, at (334) 353-8567 to speak with a background review specialist for specific information regarding the processing of the applicant’s file.

11. **How will Alabama public charter school administrators be notified of an applicant's criminal history background check results?**

The ALSDE, Educator Certification Section, will provide one of the following for all applicants for classified employment.

1. A letter verifying that there are no known convictions or pending charges for the applicant or employee.
2. A letter listing all known convictions and pending charges for the applicant or employee.
3. A letter indicating that a file was closed due to the applicant’s failure to submit requested information during the review of his/her criminal history background results.

For certified applicants for employment, the ALSDE, Educator Certification Section, will provide a suitability determination in the form of a license or certification.
Criminal history background results and the status of certificates and licenses can also be viewed by utilizing our Educator Certification Portal at https://www.alsde.edu/sec/ec/Pages/home.aspx. The Educator Certification Portal is open to authorized users and members of the public as well. For more information on gaining authorized user access to our Educator Certification Portal, contact the Office of Teaching and Leading, Educator Certification Section, at (334) 353-8567.

12. If a school administrator for an Alabama public charter school receives a letter from the ALSDE indicating that an applicant’s background review could not be completed, what does this mean?

The ALSDE Educator Certification Section routinely requests that applicants provide additional information regarding the results of their criminal history background check before a suitability determination is completed. This request is made in writing and mailed to the applicant at the address provided during fingerprint registration. In the event the applicant fails to respond to the request in a timely manner, our office will terminate the review and close the file. Notice of this closure will be sent to the applicant and to the Alabama public charter school designated by the applicant during fingerprint registration. A review may be reopened after the applicant has submitted all requested information to the ALSDE, Educator Certification Section. Applicants who have not completed a criminal history background check through the ALSDE are not eligible for employment.

13. If an employee of an Alabama public charter school is arrested subsequent to his/her initial suitability determination, will the school be notified?

The Alabama State Bureau of Investigation receives and provides updated reports of criminal arrests occurring in Alabama. Results regarding Alabama public charter school employees will be forwarded to the ALSDE, Educator Certification Section. This information will then be disseminated to the appropriate Alabama public charter school administrator.

14. Who should a person contact if he/she has additional questions regarding criminal history background check requirements?

For more information, please contact the ALSDE, Educator Certification Section, at (334) 353-8567 or via e-mail at www.alsde.edu/EdCert (click “Contact us”).

NOTE: This working document “highlights” key components of the Alabama School Choice and Student Opportunity Act (Act 2015-3), but does not attempt to address all content specific to educator certification or background checks. Information included in this working document will be updated as the Alabama State Department of Education develops specific guidance regarding Alabama public charter schools. Please send questions to pcs@alsde.edu.