MTLE Roundtable Discussion
Dr. Christopher Smith
Augsburg College
smithc2@augsburg.edu
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A digital copy of this packet can be downloaded at
Minnesota Teacher Licensure Examinations (MTLE) System: Overview & Issues from a MDE Perspective

House Education Policy Committee
February 7, 2013

"Leading for educational excellence and equity. Every day for every one."

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What are the MTLEs?

- A set of 3 separate examinations that all candidates must take and pass, each consisting of subtests:
  1. Basic Skills Tests ($50.00 for registration)
     Reading Subtest ($25.00)
     Writing Subtest ($25.00)
     Mathematics Subtest ($25.00)
  2. Pedagogy Tests ($50.00 for registration for both Pedagogy and Content tests)
     Subtest 1 ($35.00)
     Subtest 2 ($35.00)
What are the MTLEs?, (cont.)

3. Content Tests:
   Subtest 1 ($35.00)
   Subtest 2 ($35.00)
   Elementary only take a 3rd subtest ($35.00)
   • Total cost to candidates of required MTLEs = $315.00
     (Elementary = $350.00)
   • Additional costs for Pearson study materials
   • No limit on retakes: Pass rate for first attempt combined Basic Skills test only 67%; thus, 33% of
     candidates need to retake at least once. That's app. 2000+ candidates. Some candidates retake
     multiple times

MTLE System Management

• Authority to determine and implement the MTLE testing system under authority of the Board of Teaching: test selection, score setting, test validation, relationships with Pearson
• Similar teacher tests from other states are not transferable to Minnesota
• Educator Licensing advises candidates on testing requirements and verifies test scores
• Basic Skills implementation vs. Pedagogy & Content: immediate “pass” vs. 3 years
Issues to Consider

Selected Data

- In 2012-13 schools terminated 300+ teachers and, in some cases, replaced them with less qualified individuals on temporary limited or substitute licenses
- 27% of all MN school districts reported that teacher testing requirements were a “large barrier” to hiring effective teachers; in Region 1 (Northwest) 52% reported same
- Between 2010 to 2011 MN candidates completing MN programs dropped 13% (from 4334 to 3790)

Issues to Consider (cont.)

Test Administration

- Tests are timed: do they take into account respect different learning styles? What is the benefit of having it timed?
- System of providing accommodations for those with special needs.
- Remediation; what is the process for giving/receiving feedback?
Issues to Consider (cont.)

Impact on Schools Hiring
- Confusion: Basic Skills (no grace); Pedagogy and Content up to 3 years
- Experienced teacher "gap" from out-of-state

Impact on Kids
- We are losing a significant number of effective teachers: MN grads and out-of-state

General
- Are the Basis Skills really measuring what we intend them to measure?
- All MTLE's are high stakes; are all tests reviewed for fidelity?
- Are teacher tests the best measure of teacher quality?
Issues to Consider (cont.)

- What should be the impact on using the edTPA, and do we need to adjust our current testing system?
- Morale for teachers
- Coordinating systems for teacher development in terms of incorporating current research and recommendations (CCSSO, InTASC, induction, evaluation, teacher leaders),
- Alignment with move to revise federal “highly qualified” requirements

Recommendations

- Convene “work group” of stakeholders to address complex issues to provide short-term solutions
- Align implementation with work group recommendations
- Workgroup should make recommendations for a teacher testing and development system that's coordinated and ensures a higher likelihood of recruiting and retaining effective teachers.
- Long-term considerations should include but not be limited to: revised admission requirements, residency models, induction & mentoring, financial support, market considerations, geographical needs, specific learner needs
Questions?

For further questions please contact:

Richard Wassen  
Director, Educator Licensing  
651-582-8807 (direct)  
Richard.Wassen@state.mn.us
2013 REPORT OF TEACHER SUPPLY AND DEMAND IN MINNESOTA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Purpose and Executive Summary

Every two years, the Educator Licensing Division of the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) is tasked with producing a report on the supply and demand of teachers. By statute, that report must contain data collected by surveying Minnesota public school districts, charter schools, and teacher preparation institutions.

Unlike previous teacher supply-and-demand reports, this report presents the findings of pre-determined research questions. The data for addressing these questions were obtained from data files maintained by the Minnesota Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (MACTE), the Minnesota Board of Teaching (BOT), the Minnesota Center for Health Statistics (MCHS), MDE, and the U.S. Census Bureau. The data from the surveys of districts, charter schools, and teacher preparation institutions also informed findings related to the research questions.

The research questions motivating this study are:

1. What are the five-year trends in teacher staffing? Do these trends vary by teacher race/ethnicity? What are the license areas of shortage and surplus? Do these trends vary by region of the state?

2. Are there differences in the teacher shortage areas in charter schools, rural schools, and urban schools?

3. What barriers do district staff perceive as impairing their ability to hire effective teachers?

4. What factors do teacher preparation institutions cite as influencing their ability to prepare effective teachers now and during the next 10 years?

5. What K–12 public school enrollment trends are expected for particular student subgroups (e.g., racial and ethnic categories and English language learners [ELLs]) for the next three, five, and 10 years?

This report summarizes the findings and highlights the perceived teacher shortage areas and trends as measured by the data collected.

Data Sources and Limitations

The findings are based on analyses of data from the following data sources: BOT, MCHS, MDE, MACTE, and the U.S. Census Bureau. These databases were:

- the database of special permissions maintained by MDE
- county-level birth data available from MCHS' data files and website
- Minnesota Automated Student System (MARSS), Minnesota Financial Reports (MFRs), licensure database, and Staff Automated Reporting system (STAR), all housed at MDE
- county-level intercensal population estimates and Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics data from the U.S. Census Bureau
Data also were collected through two surveys:

(1) the survey of 87 percent of Minnesota's public school districts and charter schools, and

(2) the survey of 86 percent of Minnesota's teacher preparation institutions.

The findings based on data from these surveys and agency-mandated data collection systems are considered accurate and reliable. The most uncertain findings are those involving longer-term forecasts (research question 5). Although the forecast model used was the most accurate of those tested, forecasts that extend beyond three years in the future are based on assumed birth rates and the number of women between 15 and 30 years old. Each estimate has some degree of imprecision; thereby affecting the overall forecast accuracy. Education administrators who rely on these forecasts are urged to consider whether migration and birth rates have changed since the 2010–12 period and adjust their personal projections accordingly.

Key Findings

Research Question #1

Overall Picture of Teachers in Minnesota. As of the beginning of the 2011–12 school year, there were 53,133 teachers employed in Minnesota's public schools, a decline of 2.6 percent from five years earlier. Declines in numbers of teachers vary by region from 1 percent to 21 percent. While there have been increases in numbers of Asian/Pacific Islander and Hispanic teachers, the percentage of teachers of color has remained at 3.5 percent of the total teacher population as a result of declines in numbers of African-American and Native American teachers. In the past seven years the percentage of students of color grew to 26 percent in 2011-12 of the total student population, while Caucasian students declined to 74 percent.

Teacher Shortage Areas. Special permissions data indicate that during 2011-12, districts had to hire 3,447 teachers who lacked the necessary licenses for the subjects and the grade levels taught. This corresponds to 6 percent of the entire teaching workforce. The number of teachers requiring special permissions has declined from 2007–08 by about 2 percent. Special permission data and experiences of district hiring officers converge on the following 11 shortage areas:

- Emotional behavior disorders (294 permissions)
- Learning disabilities (265 permissions)
- Developmental disabilities (145 permissions)
- Early childhood special education (91 permissions)
- English as a second language (86 permissions)
- Mathematics (78 permissions)
- School psychologist (66 permissions)
- Spanish (64 permissions)
- Physics (50 permissions)
- Developmental/adapted physical education (45 permissions)
- Chemistry (43 permissions)

Many district hiring officers also mentioned having difficulty finding qualified speech language pathologists (a licensed support position for which special permissions are not granted). The
rank ordering of these hard-to-staff license areas varied slightly from year to year, but they remained within the top 11 or 12 for all five years investigated as part of this study.

**Areas of Teacher Surplus.** According to district hiring officers and the teacher preparation institutions, the teaching positions that are easiest to fill (or most difficult to place teaching program graduates) are as follows:

- K–6 elementary
- Physical education
- Social studies (high school and grades 5–8)
- Communication arts and literature (high school and grades 5–8)

**Demand for Teachers.** Several components go into estimating the demand for teachers, including teacher attrition, student enrollments, and student-teacher ratios.

- The annual teacher attrition rate between 2007 and the present has fluctuated between 8 percent and 11 percent, with no clear trend evident. The most recently calculated annual attrition rate among Minnesota teachers is 7.9 percent.
- Student enrollments in Minnesota public schools have decreased by 0.3 percent between 2005–06 and 2011–12. Schools in all but two economic development regions saw decreasing enrollments, and the decreases ranged from 0.9 percent (Southeast region) to 12.3 percent (Upper Minnesota Valley region).
- The population of students enrolled in Minnesota's public schools is becoming more diverse each year. The number of Caucasian students has decreased by 1 percent per year, while the number of students of color increased 3.7 percent since 2005-2006. The five-year period also has seen increases in the percentages of students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, who have limited English proficiency, and/or who have special needs.

**Student-Teacher Ratios.** The most recent data available (2010) indicate that the average student-teacher ratios have remained steady at 16:4. However, 30 percent of the districts responding to the district survey indicated that they had recently increased their student-teacher ratios.

Taken together, data on these components suggest that there is slightly less demand for teachers at present. Student enrollments have essentially remained unchanged, and the survey data suggest that at least 20 percent of the districts will take steps to reduce their instructional staff (by eliminating positions after attrition, dropping nonessential course offerings, and/or increasing student-teacher ratios).

**Teacher Supply.** Teachers who held the respective positions the previous year fill approximately 90 percent of the teaching positions available each year. Nine percent of the positions are filled by newly certified teachers trained in a Minnesota teacher preparation institution, teachers transferring from another district, and teachers returning to service (each source fills 3 percent of the vacant positions). The remaining 1 percent consists of teachers licensed in other states and new teachers trained in programs outside of Minnesota.

- Completers of teacher preparation programs:
  - The number of program completers from Minnesota teacher preparation programs has fluctuated between 2007 and 2011, resulting in a 9 percent net decrease. The
percentage decreases are larger for teacher shortage areas (27 percent decrease) compared with the decrease in completers in surplus areas (3 percent decrease).

- The numbers of new teacher licenses being awarded have decreased by 15.6 percent between 2007 and 2011, even in teacher shortage areas.
- The reserve pool of the total number of active license holders has increased for three traditional teacher shortage areas, remained constant for three areas, and decreased for eight shortage areas.
- The retention rates of teachers have fluctuated during the five years under investigation, with no overall trends apparent.

Taken together, these data on teacher supply suggest an overall reduction in the supply of teachers, especially in teacher shortage areas.

Research Question #2

The numbers of special permissions granted for districts in suburbs, small towns, and rural areas have decreased by 31 percent, 18 percent, and 6 percent, respectively. However, districts in urban areas have seen little overall change in the number of permissions needed to staff schools.

The numbers of permissions needed have increased for charter schools and other types of districts (i.e., cooperatives, education districts, and academies). Regular school districts have seen decreases in the number of permissions needed to staff schools.

The ranking of special permissions needed in regular school districts is similar to that of districts overall: emotional behavior disorders (191 permissions), learning disabilities (168), immersion programs in elementary education (126), developmental disabilities (106), and English as a second language (72).

The top five licensure areas for which charter schools needed special permissions were the same as those for regular school districts with one exception. Mathematics was among the top five for charter schools, but English as a second language was not.

Research Question #3

District hiring officers were asked whether certain standards or policies represented barriers to the hiring and retaining of teachers.

- Sixty-four percent of the responding districts indicated that teacher-licensing standards were either a small or a large barrier.
- Sixty-six percent of the responding districts indicated that teacher-testing requirements were a small barrier or a large barrier to obtaining new teachers.
- Sixty-one percent of the district hiring officers believed that the federal highly qualified requirements were either a small or a large barrier to hiring teachers.

Research Question #4

Teacher-testing requirements were mentioned as a barrier by 72 percent of the teacher preparation institutions. The other major impediments mentioned by 48 percent of the institutions were the cost of higher education for students and the lack of scholarships. A minority of institutions also mentioned resources for complying with accountability provisions (16
percent), resources for faculty (16 percent), low teacher salaries (12 percent), and support for
the teaching profession by the public (8 percent).

Research Question #5

Student enrollments in Minnesota’s public schools are expected to increase by
4.8 percent during the next 10 years. This figure represents a growth rate that is much more
modest than the most recent enrollment forecasts offered by the National Center for Education
Statistics (NCES; 2011 forecast to 2021 with a growth rate of 15 percent) and the Minnesota
State Demographic Center’s 2009 forecast of 7.9 percent.

Between 2012 and 2015, enrollments in elementary schools (Grades K–6) and secondary
schools (Grades 7–12) will be on divergent paths, with enrollments in elementary schools
increasing by 3 percent and enrollments in secondary schools decreasing by 0.2 percent. In
2015, the students accounting for the previous elementary school increase will begin to enter
the secondary grades, thereby reversing the trends in enrollments (elementary grades gradually
decreasing but secondary schools gradually increasing).

The relatively small numbers of students in the racial and ethnic groups make separate
forecasts for these specific groups too inaccurate to trust. However, it is possible to calculate
the number of students of color as whole. It is expected that these students will continue to
make up more and more of the student population between now and 2022, with 20 percent
growth during the first five years (through 2017) and 11 percent growth for the following five
years (2017–2022).

The forecasts of English Language Learners (ELL) also were too inaccurate to trust. The
future enrollments of these students are less related to the numbers of ELL students
currently in the system and the existing population of immigrants, but rather future
immigration rates.

Final Conclusions

The available data suggest a slight decrease in the demand for teachers, as evidenced by
district hiring officers’ indication that they have increased student-teacher ratios and eliminated
vacant positions in recent years. The supply of teachers has also decreased slightly but at a
smaller rate than demand. There are slightly fewer licensed teachers in the state than five years
ago, and fewer teaching licenses are being issued to prospective teachers. Taken together,
these data account for the slight reduction in the numbers of special permissions during the past
five years.

However, two trends should be of concern to policymakers. First, there has been a 6 percent
increase in the enrollments of students with special needs and an 8.7 percent increase in the
number of students with limited English proficiency, whereas there are fewer program
completers in the relevant teaching fields and fewer licenses being issued for some of these
areas. These data taken together suggest potential increases in shortages in these two fields
within the near future. Second, the population of students enrolled in Minnesota’s public schools
is becoming more diverse, yet the diversity of the teaching workforce remains constant.
Research suggests that being exposed to teachers of color can have positive impacts on
students of color and Caucasian students alike (Dee, 2001).
2013 Legislative Issue: MTLE Tests

Brief Description of Issue: NES-Pearson completed development of the Minnesota Teacher Licensure Examination (MTLE) tests in 2010. Use of the tests began that September, and passing scores were set by the Board of Teaching (BOT) that October. Problems with some tests have persisted and are preventing teacher candidates who demonstrate competence on other measures from attaining licensure in some fields. While ensuring teacher knowledge and competence is essential to closing the achievement gap and helping all students achieve high standards, MTLE tests present a major roadblock to licensure for some very qualified candidates, even as they incur significant expenses.

Key Points:
- Minnesota licensure tests represent only one of many assessments of a preservice teacher’s skills and knowledge. These measures include requirements for admission to, and continuing progress through, institutions and programs; standards-based performance assessments; classroom instruction assessed by experienced P-12 teachers and university faculty; and the edTPA, a nationally developed performance assessment of instructional effectiveness.
- Passing test scores need careful evaluation before results are used for high-stakes decision-making. The Board of Teaching set passing scores higher for some tests than was recommended by test designers, psychometricians, and P-12 educators and did not follow its past practice of holding candidates harmless until tests and test scores could be sufficiently evaluated. Passing rates and candidate feedback indicate that ongoing review of tests and passing scores is needed.
- Access to appropriate and timely test supports are essential to an effective testing program. Candidates and higher education institutions need to be familiar with test formats and expectations to ensure that test results reflect candidates’ true knowledge and skills, not how well they interpret test directions. Specific information about the depth and breadth of knowledge covered in the tests and specific feedback to candidates and faculty is essential to offer state-required remediation to candidates who do not achieve a passing score.
- Students must be able to take tests at times and in locations where they reside as they prepare for teaching. The testing system must take into account the “rhythm” of work and class schedules and variable completion timelines.
- Timed tests pose an additional problem for many students. Arbitrary time limits set for the MTLE tests reflect the testing company’s desire to process more candidates in less time to maximize the use of testing facilities. Time limits have no demonstrated educational or psychometric value.

Recommendation:
- Legislation should be enacted to amend MS 122A.18, as noted on the accompanying page, to add:
  - A requirement that teacher candidates be offered alternative means to demonstrate mastery of basic skills, and
  - Clarification about the requirement that candidates who fail to pass the basic skills test be provided remediation.
Proposed amendments, MS 122A.18:
During the 2012 legislative session, legislation was passed amending MS 122A.18 to require that all licensure candidates pass the basic skills MTLE tests prior to receiving teacher licensure. Because of problems and questions that have come to light since enactment of those statutory changes, and to clarify references to required remediation by colleges and universities, the Minnesota Association of Colleges for Teacher Education offer the following language for legislative consideration:

(b) The board must require a person to pass an examination of skills in reading, writing, and mathematics before being granted an initial teaching license to provide direct instruction to pupils in prekindergarten, elementary, secondary, or special education programs. Candidates who have failed to achieve a passing score on one or more subtests after one try shall be provided alternative means to demonstrate mastery of basic skills. The Board of Teaching, in consultation with the Commissioner of Education and the president of the Minnesota Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, shall identify individuals with expertise in alternative assessment strategies to determine appropriate means for such alternative, non-test demonstrations and identify for teacher candidates how to access BOT-approved alternative opportunities. The board must require e-Colleges and universities offering a board approved teacher preparation program to provide must make remedial assistance available to that includes a formal diagnostic component to persons enrolled in their institution who did not achieve a qualifying score on one or more subtest of the skills examination, including those for whom English is a second language. The colleges and universities must provide assistance in the specific academic areas of deficiency in which the person did not achieve a qualifying score. The Board of Teaching shall report annually to the education committees of the legislature on the total number of teacher candidates during the most recent school year taking the skills examination, the number who achieve a qualifying score on the examination, the number who do not achieve a qualifying score on the examination, the distribution of all candidates' scores, the number of candidates who have taken the examination at least once before, and the number of candidates who have taken the examination at least once before and achieve a qualifying score.

Recommendations to the Minnesota Board of Teaching
Given its role relative to rules about teacher preparation and licensure, we respectfully request that the Board of Teaching:
- revisit the passing scores set for all MTLE exams and reset them as needed to better reflect the already rigorous nature of the tests and sound psychometric practices;
- return to the previous practice of holding candidates “harmless” until a sufficient number of tests have been completed to ensure the fairness and validity of passing scores; and
- engage stakeholders and testing experts in crafting recommendations to address legislative concerns about the number, purpose, effects, and cost to students of tests required for licensure.
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**CAUTION: ALL DATA IS SELF-REPORTED**
### Subtest/Question Summary - Best Attempt

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### CAUTION: ALL DATA IS SELF-REPORTED

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### Minnestoa Teacher Licensure Examinations
#### Cumulative Retake Analysis
##### Basic Skills
##### September 2010 - July 2013

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**Interpretive Cautions.** The notes below are an integral part of the accompanying table.

Examinees whose data are presented in this document may not reflect the same performance as that of examinees who will take these tests in the future.

Extreme caution should be used in interpreting data for small numbers of examinees. The examinees for whom results are presented in this document may not reflect the same proportion of all the types and capabilities of examinees in the population who will take the tests in the future.
TEACHER LICENSURE ADVISORY TASK FORCE

Report Adopted January 16, 2014

Respectfully submitted to the Board of Teaching, the education commissioner, and to the chairs and ranking minority members of the Senate and House of Representatives committees and divisions with primary jurisdiction over K-12 education.

February 1, 2014
Cost of Report Preparation

The total cost for the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) to prepare this report was approximately $830. Most of these costs involved staff time in analyzing data from surveys and preparing the written report. Incidental costs include paper, copying, and other office supplies.

Estimated costs are provided in accordance with Minnesota Statutes 2011, section 3.197, which requires that at the beginning of a report to the Legislature, the cost of preparing the report must be provided.
Teacher Licensure Advisory Task Force Recommendations

Recommendation #1

The Task Force recommends repealing Minnesota Statutes, section 122A.09, Subdivision 4 (b) and provisions in section 122A.18 Subdivision 2 (b) that require a teacher licensure candidate to pass a skills examination in reading, writing and mathematics. These three subtests have been commonly referred to as the "basic skills" test. The task force supports the continuation of the requirement that a teacher licensure candidate pass examinations in pedagogy and content areas as approved by the Board of Teaching.

122A.09 DUTIES.

(b) The board must adopt rules requiring a person to pass a skills examination in reading, writing, and mathematics as a requirement for initial teacher licensure, except that the board may issue up to two additional temporary, one-year teaching licenses to an otherwise qualified candidate who has not yet passed the skills exam. Such rules must require college and universities offering a board-approved teacher preparation program to provide remedial assistance to persons who did not achieve a qualifying score on the skills examination, including those for whom English is a second language.

(e) The board must adopt rules requiring candidates for initial licenses to pass an examination of general pedagogical knowledge and examinations of licensure-specific teaching skills. The rules shall be effective by September 1, 2001. The rules under this paragraph also must require candidates for initial licenses to teach prekindergarten or elementary students to pass, as part of the examination of licensure-specific teaching skills, test items assessing the candidates' knowledge, skill, and ability in comprehensive, scientifically based reading instruction under section 122A.06, subdivision 4, and their knowledge and understanding of the foundations of reading development, the development of reading comprehension, and reading assessment and instruction, and their ability to integrate that knowledge and understanding.
Recommendation #2

The Task Force recommends that the Board of Teaching, as part of its approval process for teacher preparation programs, develop requirements that include assurances that prior to graduation and upon successful completion of an accredited teacher preparation program, teacher licensure candidates are proficient in reading, writing and mathematics at a college entrance level.

122A.09 DUTIES.

(c) The board must adopt rules to approve teacher preparation programs. The board, upon the request of a postsecondary student preparing for teacher licensure or a licensed graduate of a teacher preparation program, shall assist in resolving a dispute between the person and a postsecondary institution providing a teacher preparation program when the dispute involves an institution's recommendation for licensure affecting the person or the person's credentials. At the board's discretion, assistance may include the application of chapter 14.

Recommendation #3

The Task Force recommends that the Board of Teaching develop requirements for teacher licensure candidates who do not graduate from a Board-approved teacher preparation program, to demonstrate proficiency in reading, writing and mathematics at a college entrance level. The Board may consider the following ways of demonstrating proficiency:

1. A portfolio
2. edTPA
3. Other nationally normed tests
4. Coursework
5. Licensure from another state
6. Consideration of prior teaching service in other states/countries
7. Other alternative (non-test) pathways

Adopted January 16, 2014
Appendix C: Dissenting Report

Dissenting Report
Teacher Licensure Advisory Task Force

As part of the 2013 Education Finance bill (Chapter 116), the legislature and governor:

a. temporarily suspended the requirement that new teachers must pass basic skill exams in reading, writing and math to earn a Minnesota license; and
b. created a task force to examine and make recommendations for either maintaining the exams, or possible alternatives.

As members of the task force we believe the recommendation to permanently eliminate the basic skills exam requirement is a serious mistake, and puts Minnesota out-of-step with state and national efforts to raise expectations for new teachers.

Alternatively, we recommend the legislature and governor accept the offer by the exam vendor (Pearson) to work with the Board of Teaching to review all concerns with the exams, and make changes, if necessary – at no cost.

For nearly 30 years Minnesota has been able to assure parents, students and the public that all licensed classroom teachers have attained a basic level of mastery in reading, writing and math. In fact, as recently as 2012, Governor Dayton signed a bill that was passed by votes of 132 – 0 in the House of Representatives, and 60 – 1 in the Senate that required new teachers to pass basic skill exams before they could earn a license.

Nationally, 41 states require new teachers to pass basic skill exams, with 24 of those states requiring candidates to pass the exams prior to entering into a teacher preparation program. In many cases, these 41 states have also moved to increase their expectations (e.g. Iowa, Illinois, Virginia).

Internationally, a report by McKinsey found top performing education systems identify candidates before they enter teacher preparation programs based on:

a. a high overall level of literacy and numeracy;
b. strong interpersonal and communications skills; and
c. a willingness to learn and the motivation to teach.

Background. Through an RFP process, the Board of Teaching selected Pearson to develop new teacher licensure exams, including basic skill exams. These new exams, the Minnesota Teacher Licensure Exam (MTLE), replaced the Praxis exams, effective in 2010.

Minnesota teachers and higher education faculty were significantly engaged throughout the development of the MTLE. For example, teachers and faculty served on panels that selected exam questions, reviewed questions for bias and recommended exam passing scores. In fact, the panels’ recommended passing scores for the basic skill exams were adopted by the Board of Teaching.

A key change with the MTLE basic skill exams is the increased expectation for reading, writing and math skills. The Praxis 1 exams had a passing score set to the equivalent of a high school graduate. The MTLE’s expectations were set at a “college experienced” level, or roughly a second year college student.

From our perspective, expecting new teachers to be able to pass an objective exam of basic skills at an early college level is reasonable. It should also be noted the percent of candidates passing the exams has increased over time as candidates become more familiar with the new expectations.
Opponents of the MTLE basic skill exams have argued too many teacher candidates haven’t been able to pass because of issues such as:
  a. culturally biased exam questions;
  b. special needs accommodation policies are unclear;
  c. a lack of information is provided with exam results; and
  d. exam questions are too difficult.

Not only did the exam vendor (Pearson) meet with the task force to discuss how the development of the MTLE exams met all industry standards, but they also answered member questions about the above issues. In addition, Pearson submitted a written proposal (attached) to work with the Board of Teaching to review remaining questions and if necessary make changes to the MTLE exams — all at no cost to the state. Unfortunately, the task force failed to discuss Pearson’s offer.

We have two responses to the recommendation that teacher preparation programs simply assure the Board of Teaching that teacher candidates will graduate “proficient in reading, writing and math at a college entrance level”:
  a. College graduates should be able to read, write and do math at a level higher than someone beginning college.
  b. History shows that without a basic skill exam requirement, some teacher candidates will graduate and be eligible for a license without adequate skills in reading, writing and math.

For example, according to a 2010 Board of Teaching report of Praxis 1 exam results from 2001 – 2009:
  • 6,240 candidates failed the reading exam on their first attempt (16% of all exam takers);
  • 6,468 candidates failed the writing exam on their first attempt (16%); and
  • 4,019 candidates failed the math exam on their first attempt (10%).

Had the requirement that new teachers pass the Praxis 1 exams - set at a high school level - not been in place it’s entirely possible that many of those who didn’t pass would be in our children’s classrooms.

Frankly, we believe the task force had a clear bias against using any objective exam of basic skills to determine if a teacher candidate should be eligible for licensure. For example, the option of using student ACT scores (ACT’s college ready benchmark) as an alternative was raised, but rejected, as was Pearson’s offer to work with the Board of Teaching on possible - free - modifications to the MTLE.

The task force’s recommendation to eliminate basic skill exams is an over-reaction, and is out-of-step with efforts by other states and organizations to raise expectations for educators. Having a nationally-recognized, third-party exam of new teacher competency in the basic skills is important – not just as a safeguard for students, but as part of an overall strategy to elevate the teaching profession.

With respect to the task force’s second recommendation that the Board of Teaching develop requirements for teacher preparation programs to provide assurances that candidates are “proficient in reading, writing and math at a college entrance level”, we feel that greater emphasis on strengthening teacher preparation is critical; however, providing assurances is a far cry from requiring proficiency.

Representative Sondra Erickson
District 15A
Amy Walstien
MN Chamber of Commerce

Senator Sean Nienow
District 32
Jim Bartholomew
MN Business Partnership
Appointee, MN Chamber of Commerce
Evaluation Systems group of Pearson, the Minnesota teacher licensure testing provider, would like to offer the following constructive changes to the Basic Skills Assessment of the Minnesota Teacher Licensure Examinations (MTLE).

Pearson is committed to improving teacher licensure testing in Minnesota and is prepared to respond positively and energetically to the recommendations recorded by the members of the Basic Skills Task Force. Accordingly, Pearson, with the Board of Teaching’s oversight and direction, is prepared to assemble committees of Minnesota educators to revise the Basic Skills Assessment of MTLE by:

- Reviewing the Basic Skills test content and objectives and their alignment to the Minnesota College and Career Readiness initiatives, including the level of the test content of the mathematics assessment
- Updating the test content and objectives followed by developing new test questions, as needed, to reflect the new test content and objectives
- Reviewing all test questions, both new and existing, to prevent potential bias
- Setting a new passing score for each basic skills test in reading, mathematics and writing which will be responsive to the Task Force’s expectations for Minnesota’s teacher candidates

In addition, the Board of Teaching has received a commitment from Pearson to:

- Strengthen the application process for testing accommodation requested by candidates; review and improve the appeals component of the process, and clarify the communication about the process to candidates
- Increase preparation materials for basic skills and better communicate their availability
- Increase helpful score reporting materials for Minnesota teacher candidates
- Review and expand helpful score reporting data for Minnesota’s teacher preparation programs and the Board of Teaching as well as better communicate the availability of data-
- Respond to immersion candidates’ topics with suggestions for new policies

Pearson will implement these changes at no cost to the state.

We urge your support for these suggested plans to address topics mentioned by the Task Force and for undertaking substantive steps to revise the Basic Skills Assessments of the MTLE program.

The quality of teaching of Minnesota children is directly related to the quality of the teacher in the classroom. Pearson is committed to supporting Minnesota is its initiatives to license the highest quality teachers for its children.