



Great Teachers for All Minnesota Classrooms: Progress & Next Steps

March 2018



Introduction

From our personal memories of educators who helped shape us, to research proving those impacts are real, we know that supporting great teachers can help guarantee that every child succeeds in a rigorous and engaging education.¹ Thankfully, Minnesota policy is catching up. In recent years, legislators have advanced policies and investments to prepare, license, and retain great teachers for Minnesota students.

But passing legislation is only the first step. For policy to have its intended impact on students, state leaders and educators must embrace change and implement it well. To that end, this brief highlights recent policy changes and investments to strengthen Minnesota's teacher pipeline, and explains how they should benefit educators, schools, and students. The brief also identifies next steps for advocates, practitioners, and policymakers to further ensure that Minnesota students have the great teachers they need and deserve.



The Power of & Need for Great Teachers

Helping teachers reach their full potential in the classroom is key to ensuring that all students reach theirs. In fact, top-performing teachers add up to six months' worth of student learning compared to low-performing peers.ⁱⁱ Altogether, research shows that teachers matter more to student achievement than any other in-school factor.ⁱⁱⁱ

In Minnesota, the need for great educators at the school level is real, with school administrators feeling hiring pressure due to teacher shortages in fields from special education to math and science. These shortages have increasingly driven schools to request special permissions, such as variances, waivers, and other licensure allowances, to hire the educators they need. In fact, the number of teachers that Minnesota schools brought into the classroom on such allowances increased by 41 percent between 2011-12 and 2015-16.^{iv} The pressures continue once teachers are in the classroom: 15 percent of Minnesota educators leave teaching after one year, while 26 percent leave after three.^v The bottom line is

that we need more high-quality teachers moving into high-demand fields—and, just as important, to design our systems to help them stay there.

Who is standing at the front of the classroom may be especially important for students of color, who represent 33 percent of Minnesota's student enrollment, up from 22 percent since 2007.^{vi} While all students benefit from having teachers of color, the impacts are particularly pronounced for students of color.^{vii} For example, one recent study found that having just one black teacher significantly increases black students' likelihood of graduating from high school, while another found that black teachers are more likely to place black students in gifted and talented programs.^{viii} With Minnesota being home to some of the nation's largest achievement gaps for students of color and a teaching corps that is 96 percent white—one of the whitest in the nation—teacher diversity is a lever that could have a significant impact on student outcomes.^{ix}

Progress at the Capitol

In response to Minnesota students, families, practitioners, and advocates calling for more high-quality, well-supported, and diverse educators, the Legislature has taken important steps in recent years. From investing in new pathways into the classroom, to granting school leaders flexibility to retain their best educators, to reforming the very way Minnesota licenses teachers, policymakers have taken a multi-pronged approach to grow, strengthen, and diversify the state's teaching force.

Supporting Teacher Preparation & Recruitment

Minnesota has long relied upon traditional teacher preparation programs within colleges and universities to train educators. We've also counted on the notion that these traditional programs work for aspiring educators' schedules and budgets. But with mounting teacher shortages and stagnant educator diversity, and charter and other innovative schools developing unique, effective models that require new skillsets, the field has started to shift.* Minnesota policymakers have responded by investing in new initiatives to attract more, and more diverse, individuals into the teaching profession.

Minnesota already invests significant resources in teacher preparation, including more than \$3 million per year in targeted programs to diversify the teacher pipeline (see the table on pages 4–5), which range in focus from increasing the number of American Indian teachers to making sure low-income aspiring educators can complete their student teaching practicum. In addition to these ongoing programs, in 2017, the state made additional infusions of nearly \$4 million to support programs that explicitly seek to develop non-traditional pathways to the classroom and diversify the teaching force.

In addition to grants, loan forgiveness is another tool legislators are using. When crafted thoughtfully, loan forgiveness programs can be successful in both recruiting and retaining teachers, *particularly* into high-need schools and fields.^{xi} New programs in Minnesota should ease the financial burden of completing teacher preparation, removing barriers for individuals eager to teach in shortage areas.

With so many programs available—and many of them being so new—it's more important than ever that stakeholders follow and engage in implementation. For school leaders and administrators, that means understanding how these programs can benefit schools across the state, and watching how they play out in practice to identify gaps and opportunities. Policymakers and advocates, on the other hand, should monitor these programs closely to ensure we are getting greatest return on our investment, and be ready to invest more, or differently, depending on the outcomes.

Finally, all stakeholders should leverage insights from the state's new "teacher prep report card," passed into law in 2015. MDE is scheduled to release the first report card in 2018, detailing how the state's 30-plus teacher preparation programs—traditional, non-conventional, and alternative—are performing on various outcomes, such as graduation rates, licensure rates, job placement rates, and evaluation outcomes for their teachers. This data—some of which will be disaggregated by race—should provide advocates and policymakers with information on which programs have been most successful at preparing teachers for the classroom.

A Need (and Opportunity) for Alternative Pathways into the Classroom

One of the most notable new law changes is the creation of an Alternative Teacher Preparation Grant. For some aspiring educators, a traditional college program works well. For others, experience-based and other alternative models are a better fit, or sometimes the only fit, due to finances, scheduling, and other conflicts. Research generally shows that creating more, and more flexible, onramps into teaching does not negatively impact student achievement.^{xi} Alternative

programs also tend to recruit far more diverse teaching candidates than their traditional counterparts. The Alternative Teacher Preparation Grant allocates state funding to support the development and growth of Minnesota-based alternative preparation programs.

One of the organizations planning to apply for the grant is Lakes Country Service Cooperative, which provides services to member schools in a nine-county region in west central

Minnesota. To meet the needs of its members and area children, LCSC hopes to develop an alternative teacher licensing pathway that will initially focus on helping current teachers obtain additional licenses and endorsements that, as of right now, are available only through expensive traditional programs in higher education, or—given LCSC's location—not at all. This will allow experienced educators to fill urgent shortages, which are especially pronounced in Greater Minnesota.

Minnesota Investments that Support Teacher Training & Recruitment

Program	Purpose & Who Can Apply	How Funding Works
<p>Alternative Teacher Preparation Grant^{xii}</p> <p>Year Started 2017</p> <p>Bi-annual Amount \$750,000</p>	<p>This grant is designed to help promising alternative teacher preparation programs, whether home-grown or successful models from other states, get off the ground or continue operations in Minnesota.</p>	<p>Competitive grant; one-time appropriation for FY 2018/2019.</p>
<p>American Indian Teacher Preparation Grants^{xiii}</p> <p>Year Started 1989</p> <p>Bi-annual Amount \$460,000</p>	<p>American Indians make up 0.41 percent of Minnesota’s teachers, yet 2 percent of the state’s students. To close this gap, the Legislature funds select postsecondary institutions and districts, who then offer scholarships and student loans to help American Indians become teachers.</p>	<p>Ongoing program.</p>
<p>Collaborative Urban and Greater Minnesota Educators of Color Program (formerly CUE)^{xiv}</p> <p>Year Started 1997</p> <p>Bi-annual Amount \$1,000,000</p>	<p>To increase teacher diversity, the Legislature invests in preparation programs focused on recruiting educators of color. Currently, \$195,000 is set aside for each Concordia University, St. Thomas University, Hamline University, and Augsburg University, with \$220,000 remaining for competitive grants for all teacher preparation programs. Starting in 2020, the entire fund will be awarded competitively.</p>	<p>Ongoing program; shifting from a direct appropriation to specific teacher colleges to a competitive model open to traditional and alternative teacher preparation programs.</p>
<p>Paraprofessional Pathway to Teacher Licensure Grants (also known as Grow Your Own)^{xv}</p> <p>Year Started 2016</p> <p>Bi-annual Amount \$1,500,000</p>	<p>To help district and charter schools with at least 30 percent students of color diversify their teaching corps, grants are available to provide tuition assistance or stipends for approved nonconventional teacher residency pilot programs that have an explicit emphasis on developing teacher candidates of color.</p>	<p>Ongoing program; districts and charters may apply to the Minnesota Department of Education</p>
<p>Southwest Minnesota State University Special Education Teacher Education Program^{xvi}</p> <p>Year Started 2016</p> <p>Bi-annual Amount \$253,000</p>	<p>To prepare more special education teachers, this program helps paraprofessionals, teachers working on a variance, or community experts work towards licensure. Funding is appropriated to online special education teacher training programs directly.</p>	<p>Direct appropriation to online training programs; currently funding exists only for FY17/18.</p>

Program	Purpose & Who Can Apply	How Funding Works
<p>Student Teaching Grants^{xvii}</p> <p>Year Started 2016</p> <p>Bi-annual Amount \$3.3 million</p>	<p>To support low-income, aspiring educators, this program provides stipends for unpaid, low-income student teachers during their practicum.</p>	<p>Ongoing program; \$500,000 appropriation each year, plus one-time \$2.8 million supplemental appropriation for FY17 good through FY19.</p>
<p>Agricultural Education Loan Forgiveness^{xviii}</p> <p>Year Started 2017</p> <p>Bi-annual Amount \$50,000</p>	<p>This program supports teachers going into agricultural education by providing loan forgiveness.</p>	<p>Ongoing program; provides direct support (\$3,000 per year for up to five years) to eligible educators.</p>
<p>Teacher Shortage Loan Forgiveness^{xix}</p> <p>Year Started 2015</p> <p>Bi-annual Amount \$700,000</p>	<p>To meet urgent needs, this program supports educators teaching in shortage areas by providing them with loan forgiveness. Teacher shortage areas are determined as those licensure fields and regions reported by the commissioner of education as experiencing a teacher shortage, as well as regions where there is a shortage of licensed teachers who reflect the region's racial or ethnic diversity of students, also as reported by the commissioner.</p>	<p>Ongoing program; \$200,000 appropriation each year, plus one-time \$500,000 supplemental appropriation for 2018; provides direct support (\$1,000 per year for up to five years) to eligible educators.</p>
<p>Agricultural Educator Grants^{xx}</p> <p>Year Started 2016</p> <p>Bi-annual Amount \$250,000</p>	<p>This program supports districts offering agricultural education with matching grants to pay for agricultural education teachers during the summer months.</p>	<p>Ongoing program; districts may apply to the Minnesota Department of Education.</p>
<p>Concurrent Enrollment Teacher Training Grants^{xxi}</p> <p>Year Started 2017</p> <p>Bi-annual Amount \$375,000</p>	<p>Provides grants to district and charter schools to train teachers for concurrent enrollment coursework. Grants can also be used to develop dual enrollment courses to promote the field of teaching for high school students.</p>	<p>Ongoing program; districts may apply to the Minnesota Department of Education.</p>

Streamlining Teacher Licensure

A strong teacher licensure framework is important to ensuring we're placing high-quality, vetted educators in front of each classroom. But for too long, Minnesota has emphasized inputs without linking those variables to demonstrable success in the classroom. The state has also diffused licensure responsibilities—and accountability—across two separate agencies, leading to confusion and arbitrary barriers that keep high-quality teachers out of the classroom. After years of debate, and based on the findings of an intensive non-partisan legislative audit, Minnesota is completely revamping teacher licensure and the governance system that oversees it.

First, legislators fixed structural licensure problems, closing the disconnect between policymaking and implementation. On Jan. 1, 2018, a new, Governor-appointed, independent 11-member Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board replaced the Board of Teaching—which previously oversaw licensure rulemaking, appeals, and revocations, as well as teacher preparation approval—and took over licensure operations from the Minnesota Department of Education, which was formerly responsible for implementation. PELSB regulates and processes all aspects of teacher licensing, including initial licensure decisions,

renewals, and approval of both traditional and alternative teacher preparation programs. Importantly, PELSB can no longer delegate licensing decisions to other entities, such as teacher preparation programs at colleges and universities.

State lawmakers also created a clear tiered licensure model, replacing Minnesota's puzzling patchwork of licenses and exceptions (see table on pages 8–9). The new model, which goes into effect on July 1, 2018, creates clear standards and entry-points for educators with varying experiences, trainings, and backgrounds. It also sets a first-ever floor for entry into the classroom—a change from the old system, which relied on subjective and unpredictable case-by-case decision-making.

Ultimately, these changes will help schools recruit and hire the teachers they need—whether from a traditional preparation program, an alternative model, out-of-state, or for a very specific need, like career and technical education. It is critical for PELSB to adopt a new vision, and for advocates, legislators, and school leaders to play the role of watchdog to ensure the new board does not repeat mistakes from the past.



We're excited about the recent changes to both teacher prep and licensure because we know it's critical to increase pathways to the classroom for awesome people, especially those who share our students' backgrounds. With the overhaul, for example, experienced paraprofessionals who want to lead their own classrooms (and who would be excellent at it!), but for whom finances have been a barrier, will now have an opportunity to become teachers and advance their careers. It's important for kids to have teachers who reflect who they are. The recent changes to teacher licensure and prep will help us recruit and retain great, diverse people who we know will make excellent teachers, but who have never before had the chance.

Dawn Gunderson Taylor

Chief Talent Officer of Hiawatha Academies in Minneapolis

Recent Licensure Exam Changes

While teacher licensure exams can help measure whether candidates are ready for the classroom, they're certainly not the only tool, nor do they always measure what truly matters: a candidate's potential to be an effective educator. In fact, research shows that teacher licensure exams may prevent would-be effective educators from earning their licenses.^{xxii} To maintain clear standards while ensuring we don't needlessly keep great teachers out of the classroom, the state has recently made several changes to teacher licensure assessments.

Previously, all new Minnesota teachers had to pass the Minnesota Teacher Licensing Basic Skills Exam. But due to high cut scores, many struggled to pass, keeping otherwise qualified teachers from receiving a standard teaching license. To give aspiring educators more

flexibility to demonstrate core knowledge, the state replaced MTLE Basic Skills with a suite of options, including the ACT, SAT, Praxis I, and NES, and adopted cut scores better aligned with classroom requirements in reading, writing, and math.

The Legislature also built different testing requirements into the new tiered licensure system. Most educators must take and pass the content and pedagogy exams when applying for a Tier 3 or Tier 4 license, but only Tier 4 candidates must pass the board-approved basic skills examinations. Although not required, educators in Tier 1 and Tier 2 may use the MTLE as an option to demonstrate knowledge or preparation.

Minnesota's New Licensure Tiers: Checklist for Teachers & Schools

TIER 1

Requirements

1. Educators must hold a bachelor's degree, or if teaching in career and technical education, have one of the following: an associate's degree, a professional credential, or five years of work experience in the content area.
2. Educators must participate in district mentorship and induction programs, if available, participate in teacher evaluations, and take content exams (unless teaching in career and technical education).
3. School must affirm the candidate has the necessary skills and knowledge and must demonstrate that they were unable to hire a higher-tiered teacher.

Terms and Renewals

One-year license with up to three renewals, unless schools can present a further need or if there is a teacher shortage. License is limited to the employing school district (cannot be transferred).

TIER 2

Requirements

1. Educators must hold a bachelor's degree, or if teaching in career and technical education, have one of the following: an associate's degree, a professional credential, or five years of work experience in the content area.
2. Educators must be enrolled in a Minnesota teacher preparation program, hold a master's degree in the content area, or fulfill at least two of the following:
 - have 8 upper division credits in content area;
 - completed field-specific methods training;
 - have two-years of teaching experience in content area;
 - receive passing scores on content and pedagogy exams;
 - completed a state-approved teacher preparation program.
3. Educators must participate in district mentorship and induction programs, if available, and participate in teacher evaluations.

Terms and Renewals

Two-year license with up to three renewals unless the PELSB writes rules to extend renewals. License is limited to the employing school district (cannot be transferred).

Requirements

1. Educators must hold a bachelor's degree, or if teaching in career and technical education, have one of the following: an associate's degree, a professional credential, or five years of work experience in the content area.
2. Educators must receive passing scores on content and pedagogy exams.
3. Educators must participate in district mentorship and induction programs, if available, and participate in teacher evaluations.
4. Educators must fulfill at least one of the following:
 - completed a Minnesota teacher preparation program;
 - completed a state-approved teacher preparation program with field-specific student teaching or at least two years of teaching experience;
 - submitted an application for licensure via portfolio;
 - hold an out-of-state license with at least two years of teaching experience; or
 - completed three years teaching experience in Tier 2 with successful summative evaluation.

Terms and Renewals

Three-year license with unlimited renewability.

Requirements

1. Educators must hold a Tier 3 license.
2. Educators must receive passing scores on all exams.
3. Educators must have three years of teaching experience in Minnesota.
4. Educators' most recent summative teacher evaluation cannot have placed them on an improvement plan.
5. Educators must have completed a state-approved teacher preparation program.

Terms and Renewals

Five-year license with unlimited renewability.

Retaining Effective Educators

Once great teachers are recruited, prepared, and hired into schools, it's critical that policies and supports help them stay. This is especially true for educators of color, who currently leave the profession at higher rates than their white colleagues.^{xxiii} To encourage all great teachers to stay, Minnesota policymakers have invested in new programs, expanded existing ones, and reformed outdated policies to empower schools to retain their best teachers and provide opportunities for them to grow in their craft.

Strengthening Quality Compensation

Compensation is one important piece of the retention puzzle. While state funding and district contracts largely control salary decisions, one area where state policymakers have stepped in is around Alternative Teacher Pay, or Quality Compensation. Q Comp empowers district and charter schools to use additional state funds to pay a hiring bonus or other added compensation to retain teachers who increase diversity, fill high-need or hard-to-fill positions, or work in a hard-to-staff school that is high-poverty, geographically isolated, or identified by the state for targeted programs. Schools can also use Q Comp revenue to pay incentives or provide assistance to teachers to pursue a master's degree, obtain content area credits for concurrent enrollment courses, or seek training or education to obtain an additional license in an identified shortage area. Finally, Q Comp funding can support new Grow Your Own initiatives, which help non-licensed educational professionals, paraprofessionals, or cultural liaisons work

towards licensure. Use of Q Comp funds is contingent on an agreement between the district and the local teacher bargaining unit, or for charter schools without a collective bargaining unit, a clear majority of teachers.

Supporting Continuing Education

Continuing education for educators is important, but it can also present hurdles for teachers already in the classroom. To support educators seeking additional education—and to encourage them to advance in their field—Minnesota has two programs with different goals.

First, teachers working towards a master's degree in their licensure content area are eligible for a refundable tax credit up to \$2,500. Elementary teachers qualify for the tax credit for a master's in English, math, science, civics, or another core subject area. Also, as discussed above, the Legislature has modified Q Comp so that schools can use funds to help teachers complete their master's degree.

Second, as highlighted in the table on pages 4–5, the state invests \$375,000 each year in an initiative to help high school teachers obtain the additional postsecondary credits required to teach college-credit bearing concurrent enrollment courses. Concurrent enrollment is a growing trend, and for good reason. Research shows that students who participate in concurrent enrollment courses are more likely to graduate from high school, start and finish an advanced degree, and avoid remedial coursework.^{xxiv}

These programs are especially important in light of a recent decision from the Higher Learning Commission—the country’s largest regional college accreditor—to enforce a policy that high school teachers in dual-credit courses must meet the same faculty credentialing requirements as their postsecondary counterparts, which oftentimes includes a master’s degree or at least 18 graduate-level credits in the content area. Dual credit courses, also known as dual enrollment, allow high school students to take college courses and earn credit before graduation. Schools across the state must find educators who have met these requirements in order to continue to offer dual credit courses.^{xxv}

Helping Districts Retain Their Best

For too long, Minnesota law set a state default “Last In, First Out” layoff policy, which in practice gave school

administrators little flexibility to retain their best educators during staff reductions. In line with research and Minnesota public opinion, the Legislature repealed the archaic LIFO default in 2017, removing one important barrier to putting teacher effectiveness and student needs ahead of seniority.^{xxvi} Under the new law—which will affect contracts negotiated starting in 2019—local districts and unions have full responsibility for developing a local policy around staff reductions. Whether this policy results in meaningful change for students on the ground will now fall to district and union contract negotiators—and community stakeholders watching the process. Districts should find ways to work with unions to re-think the primacy of seniority in layoff decisions. While seniority can still be a factor, it should not be the only one. If student success is the ultimate goal, policies should allow schools to retain highly effective and diverse educators, many of whom are newer to the classroom.





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As an educator and a mother, I know that it is absolutely critical that Minnesota get serious about teacher quality and diversity. Our future quite literally depends on it. For too long, Minnesota has relied on a very traditional approach of preparing teachers—and it hasn't been working. Teachers of color are few and far between, and some of the most “prepared” educators (at least according to their credits and diplomas) my children have encountered were not at all ready for the classroom. I'm thankful that state leaders are taking these issues seriously, and creating new pathways into the classroom that treat aspiring educators as more than just their degrees and credentials. But until we have a teaching force that truly reflects our children, and is prepared to help them excel, the work is not over.

Alida Abdullah

parent, educator, and advocate

Next Steps

First and foremost, to ensure the state's investments and policy changes positively impact students, school and district leaders need to use them. Administrators should focus on hiring the very best candidates and encouraging aspiring educators to explore new pathways into the classroom. If, in this process, educators and school leaders encounter barriers, advocates and policymakers must play a proactive role in removing them, whether at the legislative or administrative level.

Further, despite recent and important progress, it is clear that we must do even more to open onramps into teaching, with the ultimate goal of getting, and keeping, great teachers in front of every Minnesota classroom. It is important, too, that we protect and build upon recent legislative changes and investments. Here, we highlight some key next steps in the work to build a high-quality, diverse teacher talent pipeline that meets the needs of Minnesota students and schools.

Recognize and support many pathways to become an effective teacher. Policymakers, advocates, and community leaders should change the way we think and talk about teacher preparation: There is no single "right" way into the classroom for prospective educators. Traditional teacher certification pathways can be expensive and time-consuming, especially for low-income teacher candidates or aspiring teachers of color, and research consistently shows that traditional pathways are no more likely to produce

effective educators than non-traditional and alternative teacher preparation programs.^{xxvii} In addition to supporting innovation in teacher prep, policymakers and state administrators have a tangible opportunity to create new onramps into the classroom immediately. First, they should ensure successful rollout of alternative preparation laws, providing guidance and approval to high-quality programs attempting to take root in Minnesota. Secondly, they should properly implement the new alternative preparation grant program, tracking the success of the programs funded in the first round, and expanding funding to support either growth of successful models or expansion to similar proven models.

Follow through on efforts to streamline teacher licensure. The recent overhaul of Minnesota's teacher licensure is the result of a bipartisan legislative working group and employs, in large part, recommendations from the well-respected nonpartisan Office of the Legislative Auditor. Moving forward, it is critical to both defend key changes and ensure they are implemented as intended, creating clear pathways to licensure for educators from all backgrounds. Specifically, members of the new Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board should avoid the pitfalls of their predecessors at the Board of Teaching by carrying out legislative intent through rulemaking and implementation.

Match teacher supply with demand.

Ensuring that teacher prep is as responsive as possible to evolving classroom needs benefits everyone. Whether through regulations or incentives, state leaders should encourage teacher preparation programs to better align teacher supply with demand. Despite shortages in special education, STEM, and other licensure fields, Minnesota teacher preparation programs overproduce teachers in certain fields, such as elementary education, Language Arts, and Social Studies.^{xxviii} Policymakers should play a role in correcting this—whether through better data sharing, incentives, or other policy measures—to ensure that teacher preparation programs are graduating students with the skills needed to meet hiring demands.

Help attract and keep effective teachers in the highest-need schools and subjects. Almost all school districts use strictly defined salary schedules, which consider a teacher's seniority

over their effectiveness, subject area, or school placement. These defined salary schedules make it harder to staff certain schools and subjects, and also hinder the retention and advancement of talented young teachers. Thankfully, policymakers and practitioners can take steps to change this, empowering schools to align compensation with student needs. As a first step, state and school leaders can grow, improve, and expand the flexibility of Q Comp. For example, districts should align measures used to determine performance-based pay bonuses with those used to determine alternative salary schedules. Doing so would reward sustained teacher effectiveness and support the retention of excellent teachers. Additionally, policymakers and MDE should explicitly give school leaders more financial control of their Q Comp resources so that they can develop creative ways to attract and retain effective educators, especially in hard-to-staff schools and positions.^{xxix}



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