

Minnesota Association of Colleges for Teacher Education

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2014 Policy Issue: Assessments for Teacher Licensure

Brief Description of Issue: Teacher candidates in Minnesota are required to complete an array of assessments. In addition to assessments required for admission and continuing progress in teacher preparation programs, teacher candidates currently must complete at least three Minnesota Teacher Licensure Examination (MTLE) tests (Basic Skills, Pedagogy, and Content) and the edTPA (Teacher Performance Assessment), a performance-based assessment. Problems with some tests persist and are preventing teacher candidates who demonstrate competence on other measures from attaining licensure. These problems led the 2013 Minnesota Legislature to direct formation of a Teacher Licensure Task Force charged with learning more about current testing procedures and problems and developing recommendations for future testing requirements.

Key Points:

- **Passing test scores need careful evaluation before results are used for high-stakes decision-making.** The Board of Teaching (BOT) initially set passing scores for some tests higher than was recommended by test designers, psychometricians, and educators and did not follow its past practice of holding candidates harmless until tests could be sufficiently evaluated. Based on actual test administration, the BOT has now set cut scores for all tests at the recommended levels.
- **A number of factors have significant impact on candidates as they seek to complete and pass all required tests.** Specifically:
 - **Access to appropriate and timely test supports are essential to an effective testing program.** In particular, 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 convenient times and locations.** The testing system must take into account the “rhythm” of work, classes, and field experiences.
 - **Timed tests pose an additional problem for many students.** In the absence of evidence of psychometric or educational value of time limits, adjustments need to be made to ensure that test scores measure skills and knowledge, not processing speed.
 - **Accommodations must be made for documented disabilities and non-native English speakers.** Too many requests for accommodations have been denied.
- **The possibility of cultural bias in current tests has become increasingly clear based on test results and vendor and candidate testimony shared with the Teacher Licensure Task Force.** Students who are otherwise competent, especially those of color or who are not native English speakers, are at a disadvantage. This barrier is in direct conflict with the state’s need for a more diverse teaching force.

Recommendations:

- As recommended by the Teacher Licensure Task Force, the legislature should repeal MS 122A.09 Subp4(b) and MS 122A.18 Sub2(b); the BOT should include assurances of appropriate proficiency in reading, writing, and mathematics within its program approval process; and the BOT should define multiple means by which teacher candidates who have not graduated from a BOT-approved program can demonstrate proficiency in reading, writing, and mathematics.
- The Board of Teaching should continue to assess the purpose, costs, appropriate uses, reliability, and predictive validity of assessments as it develops and implements rules and requirements for teacher candidates, with particular attention to the appropriate uses of assessments for used for consequential employment decisions related to licensure.

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