

Minnesota Association of Colleges for Teacher Education

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2014 Policy Issue: Alternative Pathways to Teacher Licensure

Brief Description of Issue: In recent years, much discussion has focused on the quality of teachers and the type of preparation needed to meet the diverse needs of our nation's students. One result has been increased attention to alternative pathways to teacher licensure. Colleges and universities have responded with new models, including post-baccalaureate and "Fast Track" licensure programs and programs embedded into P-12 schools that deepen clinical experiences and tap the expertise of teachers and administrators. However, since the academic growth of students taught by some alternatively certified teachers has been called into question, in part because of small gains in achievement often lost through high teacher attrition and turnover, policy discussions regarding all pathways to licensure need to focus on research-based components and curricular designs that assure effective, standards-based preparation; produce desired student outcomes; and focus on licensure and retention of our most effective teachers.

Key Points:

- **Minnesota's licensure structure has long enabled multiple pathways to licensure.** In 2011, the Minnesota legislature set benchmark standards for alternative teacher preparation programs and directed the Minnesota Board of Teaching to establish a process for approving these alternative programs.
- **Many alternative pathways focus on areas of teacher shortage.** In Minnesota, there are few areas of teacher shortage, with the exception of math, science and special education. New special education licensure rules and programs may reduce those shortages.
- **Some alternative pathways to licensure provide candidates with very brief periods of preparation in teaching methods prior to being placed in classrooms as the "teachers of record"** without a co-teaching supervisor or regular mentor. These candidates function as classroom teachers while they complete their preparation; learning effective teaching strategies, classroom management strategies, and other essential skills needed to meet the Minnesota Standards of Effective Practice. Not all alternative pathway candidates complete licensure preparation during their work as the teacher of record.
- **Many research studies have compared the effectiveness of traditionally and alternatively prepared teachers.** Results continue to indicate that licensed teachers who remain in teaching past three years outperform unlicensed teachers. The studies are inconclusive about which aspects of alternative licensure programs might assure effective long-term student achievement.
- **Alternatively prepared teachers are placed disproportionately in hard-to-staff urban schools, often by design.** While some suggest that this improves teacher quality in urban schools, others have demonstrated that this practice is increasing the extent to which urban learners are disproportionately taught by under-prepared teachers, and the practice leads to increasing the turn-over rate of teachers which results in low student achievement.

Recommendations:

- Require alternative pathways in Minnesota to meet the same, high standards to which traditional programs are held; provide the same extensive documentation about candidate performance; and complete the same rigorous and regular approval process.
- Require that any alternative licensure program approved to operate in Minnesota be actively partnered with an approved Minnesota postsecondary preparation program.

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