

Minnesota Association of Colleges for Teacher Education

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Teacher Licensure Testing – Areas of Clarification in the Request For Proposals June 12, 2015

MACTE would like to commend the Board of Teaching for their review and actions to rectify issues that have been present with the current MTLE examinations. Although the legislature did not eliminate the “Basic Skills” test, the option of using the ACT/SAT tests was a partial step toward solving some of the inequities this test caused. By lowering the cut score for the MTLE content and pedagogy tests to that recommended by Pearson and the standard setting committee, the Board also alleviated some of the challenges to candidates and teacher education programs. We also understand that issues still remain and commend the Board for instituting a new RFP process to help address the concerns that arose over the last five years which presented extreme hardships, inequities, and biases in the testing process. After reviewing the new RFP, MACTE would like to share some areas of the RFP that may need special attention or additional clarity during the review process.

Language clarifications:

- “Reading, math, writing basic skills” - There has been such confusion about the words “basic skills” and what that means in the current MTLE that the use of the word “basic skills” may permit this to continue. The legislation simply requires a reading, math, and writing examination and leaving the language as such may permit a wider, more helpful determination of the level of performance that is needed for a successful teacher. Since there is no statistical correlation between these areas and the effectiveness of a teacher, the use of broader interpretation language is highly warranted. Anywhere the words “basic skills” appears should be stricken from consideration because they mean different things to different people and the new examinations should not be labeled as “basic skills” exams.
- “Minimal qualifying score” – This language can inappropriately be interpreted as a minimal score and the lay person may say we don’t want teachers with the minimum. That is not what this means, but can be easily misinterpreted. We would suggest using the words “recommended passing score”, “beginning teacher qualifying score”, or “appropriate qualifying score” to prevent misinterpretation.

Alignment and Feedback clarifications:

- Feedback needs to be aligned to the standards (Reading, Math, Writing, SEPs or Content) and reported by standard to permit appropriate feedback to candidates and programs for remediation. Since the Minnesota SEPs are not yet aligned with the new national INTASC standards, it must be understood that the test will not be comparable to other state tests until the new alignment process is completed and the test is revised accordingly. This does have implications for the ability to report test bias because the test will have insufficient test takers to norm this area until the SEPs are aligned with INTASC. Reporting by broad strands is insufficient and unusable feedback in supporting candidates.

In content areas where there is a wide breadth of content that may be assessed and there are multiple subjects or centuries of information tested (social studies, communications, science,

- languages), there is a need for more specificity of feedback to identify areas where the candidate and programs may need to improve learning.
- The grade equivalency of reading, math, and writing questions must be clearly identified for each question and also provided in the feedback.
- The feedback needs to be communicated in a usable format that helps the candidate and program understand where specific improvements may be needed. Scores or stars communicate a quantity needed not the specific qualities needed for improvement.
- Data must be disaggregated by demographics, by standards, and by content topics and shared not just with BOT, but with IHEs to permit analysis for test bias, demographic bias, and improvements in standards or programs. Specific attention to racial, ethnic, economic, and second language demographics is needed to assure that the tests are not biased in denying licenses to diverse candidates.

Time clarifications:

- Specific clarification for the “untimed test” clause in the RFP is needed. Do all candidates have the right to “extended time” or only those with specific accommodations and/or whose primary language is not English?
- Clarification is needed for how much time is normally provided, how much additional time will be allowed, and how ‘break time’ will be calculated when a candidate needs to take a break during long testing periods. Currently, “break time” is included in the testing time.
- The phrase “all students have an equitable amount of time to test” can be construed to mean that they all have the same limited amount of time to test. In the case of testing, equal is not necessarily fair and equitable. How will equity be determined?
- Does the test vendor provide ongoing test analysis information about the impact of test time and demonstrate a willingness to revise questions or time based upon that analysis?

Accommodations clarifications:

- We need to assure that a documented disability from high school is honored at the higher education level. If the higher education institution provides documentation of disability based upon whatever process they use to make this recommendation, additional outside documentation from medical professionals should not be required by the test vendor. This causes financial inequities for candidates.
- Please clarify how quickly requests for accommodations should be addressed. Sometimes the delays are unacceptable and cause hardships for candidates completing programs.

Implementation timeline clarifications:

- Please clarify the timeline for the transition. The transition will require collecting data on how Minnesota candidates are performing, planning for testing changes, and when new tests will be consequential. When the testing change occurred in 2010, there was no implementation and analysis phase. Had there been, many of the inequities that resulted in severe hardships for candidates could have been rectified. Pilot administration and data analysis is needed to determine the appropriateness of test questions, appropriate cut scores, test bias, and test impact on candidates and programs.

