

Minnesota Association of Colleges for Teacher Education

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MACTE Message to the Board of Teaching September 23, 2011

The Minnesota Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (MACTE) commends the Minnesota Board of Teaching for their commitment to the pursuit of high standards in teacher preparation. Educators recognize that effective instruction is a complex process requiring teachers to draw together and employ relevant knowledge, skills and dispositions focused on the learner, what is to be learned, and the setting in which learning is to occur. So complex a process as teaching requires the use of multiple methods of assessment in a variety of settings to accurately judge our candidates' performance. No single measure can predict a novice teacher's success.

MACTE also supports the Board's decision to grant one-year temporary limited licensure to candidates who have not yet passed one or more of the required pedagogy or content tests during the 2011-2012 school year. This action reduces the penalty experienced by students caught between the previously used Praxis tests and the newly devised Minnesota Teacher Licensure Examinations (MTLE). Many of these students suffered limited or no access to preparatory guides that were available for those completing the Praxis series of licensure tests.

We welcome the opportunity today to collaborate on the review of this first year of MTLE data and ask the Board to consider the following as we move forward in this process.

MACTE supports the use of Minnesota's teacher licensure standards to devise examinations that can affirm candidates' attainment of those standards as approved by the Board of Teaching. We believe the process used by the test developer to create test items, estimate their levels of difficulty, and establish passing scores was psychometrically sound. We thus urge the Board to establish scores as recommended by Pearson and by those Minnesota teachers who invested their time and talent in the design of these tests.

Test development is a complex process. Establishing the MTLE tests required the input of numerous content experts. These professionals were charged to rely on their many years of teaching experience in evaluating test items. Their task was to determine what a newly licensed teacher "would know". The test development panelists also determined the "level of ability" that predicts high standards of performance for novice teachers about to begin their first year of practice.

The Minnesota Standards of Effective Practice and related licensure content standards serve as the criteria on which the MTLE's are based. In the context of high standards, the technical term "just acceptable" is commonly used by test developers. Applied to the MTLE's this term is used to define the point at which a novice teacher has acquired a foundational level of knowledge and

skill to support initial practice. It cannot be interpreted in the same way as performance on a classroom test, where each test item is equally weighted and often focused on recall of factual information. Unfortunately, the term “just acceptable,” was applied to describe the level of knowledge represented by the recommended cut scores for each test.

The MTLE test is a criterion-referenced test that uses the Minnesota Standards of Effective Practice, viewed nationally as rigorous expectations for beginning teachers. The scores are reported as “scaled scores”, much like the ACT exam that college-bound students take. Interpreting a scaled score is very different from interpreting a score based on “percentage correct calculation. Using the ACT as an example, an ACT scaled-score of 22.9 represents the mean Minnesota score for 2011. The highest possible score is 36. This mean score, if referenced to a percentage, indicates the average Minnesota student earned only “67%” of the maximum score, hardly an impressive performance on a classroom test. Further, if we were to calculate the actual percentage of questions answered correctly in order to earn a score of 21, the U.S. mean ACT score, we may be surprised to find that it is actually less than 44%.

MTLE tests require careful interpretation. The panels of teachers were asked to rank each test item for level of difficulty. This data combined with actual candidate performance on test items was used to create a mathematical formula to establish scaled scores. As noted on the MTLE web page, “A scaled score is a conversion of the numerical raw score achieved on the test to a score in the predetermined range used for each test. Scaled scores are used to ensure consistency in reporting and considering scores from tests that comprise different numbers and types of test questions but display an overall similarity of use and purpose. The scoring scale currently in use in the MTLE is a 100 to 300 scale.”

Licensure examinations, like other standards-referenced tests, include items that represent a wide range of “difficulty.” These tests include some items that nearly all test-takers are expected to correctly answer. They also include items that very few if any in the pool of examinees are expected to correctly answer. Selecting and weighting items to reflect a range of difficulty enhances a test’s ability to identify those candidates who have acquired an expert-defined foundational level of knowledge necessary for a successful first year of teaching practice. Increasing the “cut” score above that foundational level may appear to support “high standards,” but only risks rejecting those who would otherwise be competent novice teachers. Setting a cut score that only a master teacher could reach by correctly answering the most difficult items that are beyond the experience of a novice teacher sets an unrealistic standard that does not accurately reflect the experience of candidates entering the profession.

While we know that it is the intent of the Board to uphold high standards and not to penalize teacher education candidates who were completing their preparation programs at the time the MTLE’s were implemented, we strongly encourage the Board to amend the cut score decision to match the recommendation of the test design experts and the panels of experts who contributed to that recommendation. In closing we look forward to continued collaboration with the Board of Teaching and extend our appreciation for your commitment to teacher education, our candidates, and the P-12 students they will be teaching.

