

# Minnesota Association of Colleges for Teacher Education

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As we move toward the introduction of a new academic skills test in September of next year, replacing the ETS Praxis I exam with the Pearson MTLE basic skills test, it is imperative to note unintended effects of moving from a test equated to high school performance in reading, writing, and the use of mathematics to a new test designed to verify those academic skills at the level of college sophomores. While MACTE supports high standards for all teachers in Minnesota and across the nation, let's focus for a minute on what this new basic skills test might mean for pre-service teacher candidates of color.

Years of Praxis I results are clear; students of color do not pass the current Praxis I, or other standardized tests, at the same rate as do white students. With the adoption of the Pearson MTLE test we might expect that many more prospective teachers, including candidates of color, will not clear this hurdle. While we are searching for new ways to improve the diversity of Minnesota's teachers, working to find and preparing more teachers of color who can better serve as role models for our K-12 students, Minnesota will be discouraging those seeking to become teachers who cannot pass a standardized test set at arbitrary level without regard for unintended consequences. The very people our schools, colleges, and departments of education are trying to encourage, mentor and support may thus be denied access to teacher education programs.

We know it is possible to have higher expectations for the academic skills of candidates seeking licensure as Minnesota teachers and still retain students of color in our preparation programs. To do so will require more time, more staff, and more support from our state government and public agencies for Minnesota's K-12 schools and colleges. If we have the resources, we can provide the developmental instruction that will enable students of color to achieve at the same or higher scores as their white peers. Until we are ready to invest those resources, however, ever fewer candidates of color will become teachers in Minnesota's classrooms.

MACTE institutions have frequently discussed ways to recruit and retain students of color in our teacher education programs. Increasing diversity in our higher education classrooms is an important goal and a focus for BOT, NCATE and TEAC accreditation. Moreover, increasing the cultural competence of all our teacher candidates remains a critical element in developing a long term solution to the achievement gap.

Some have estimated that as many as one-half of the students who will take the new MLTE may not pass this hurdle. Like other basic skills tests, as well as the ACT and SAT, the MLTE will likely be a poor predictor of first year students who would become effective teachers. Those of us who work with prospective teachers will easily recall candidates who revealed exemplary teaching skills in clinical settings and who performed well in their college courses, yet wrestled with the mystique of standardized testing. To help them, we offer developmental courses, tutors, and mentors who help identify and correct deficient academic skills. For those who have the passion to teach, we help establish a foundation of skill and knowledge that will support their continuing success in college work and beyond.

Unfortunately, should the MLTE's difficulty level increase, we will have to provide that kind of intensive academic support for a greater number of prospective candidates, and for a longer time, but without additional resources to do so. It's likely that many, especially candidates of color, will choose another career path.

Last January's MACTE Minute affirmed our confidence in the academic skills of our teacher candidates. That confident assessment remains true today. Our prospective teachers work hard to pass the rigorous requirements we set for entry and continued success in Minnesota's teacher education programs. If we create an even higher barrier for those who would begin their preparation for licensure, a barrier not predictive of successful teaching, fewer students of color will enter Minnesota's classrooms in the years ahead. If so, children of color who are enrolled in Minnesota's public schools will still not see their future in the faces of their teachers.

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