

Minnesota Association of Colleges for Teacher Education

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Who Will Teach Minnesota's Children?

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Who will teach Minnesota's children? That is one of the questions that legislators will answer during the 2004 session. Up to now, all Minnesota teachers have met the high standards set by the Board of Teaching and articulated in the Standards of Effective Practice. This includes teachers who are prepared at one of the twenty-nine institutions with Board of Teaching approved teacher preparation programs as well as those who are prepared elsewhere but choose to teach in Minnesota-- one consistent set of high standards for all teachers. Our high standards for Minnesota educators are clearly reflected in our students' achievement:

- Minnesota eighth grade students ranked first in the nation in math proficiency on the 2003 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) while Minnesota fourth graders ranked second in math proficiency in 2003.
- Minnesota and Singapore ranked first in the world in earth science and only Singapore significantly outscored Minnesota eighth graders on the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) science assessment. Minnesota eighth graders also tied for second in the U.S. in science proficiency on the 2000 NAEP.
- Minnesota fourth and eighth graders rank fifth in the nation in reading proficiency.
- In 2000, 90.8 percent of Minnesotans 25 and older had a high school degree, the third highest rate in the nation.
- Minnesota has produced the second largest number of National Teachers of the Year.

Currently a bill is being proposed that would establish a two-track licensure system. On one track would be teachers who meet all the Minnesota Standards of Effective Practice. On a second track would be teachers who would follow an "alternative" expedited route to licensure. Why a two-track system?

Certainly it is not because there is a shortage of teachers in Minnesota. Last year, over 1000 teachers were laid off. This spring, in all likelihood, hundreds more will receive pink slips due to the economic climate in our school districts.

It's also not because we have large numbers of teachers teaching outside the scope of their license. In fact, based on data reported by the Minnesota Department of Education to the US Department of Education, 96% of Minnesota teachers are fully licensed for the classes they are teaching. With only 3.9% of the teaching force on waivers or other exceptions, Minnesota ranks first in the nation for having teachers appropriately licensed.

Minnesota's colleges and universities already offer alternative pathways to licensure for those people currently in the workforce who want to become teachers. Some of these approved programs use a weekend or evening school format; some are offered in off-site locations convenient to students; some are compressed summer-based programs; and some are predominately online.

Recent research indicates the value of completing a licensure program at a college or university. For example, retention rates in the first five years of teaching are nearly 30% higher than those who do not complete a licensure program at a four-year institution.

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Minnesota's twenty-nine teacher preparation programs provide high quality teachers to the state in sufficient numbers in most areas of licensure. New programs should reflect the same standards and quality as existing programs, not a lesser expectation. Our P-12 students are too important to our collective future to shortchange the preparation of their teachers.

So who will teach Minnesota's children? Determining the answer to this question is an awesome responsibility. We hope our legislators will make their decisions based on the facts about teacher preparation in Minnesota and not on data from states with far lower standards or a shortage of qualified teachers.

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