

Minnesota Teacher Licensure Exam (MTLE) discussion points for legislators

We are asking you to support the recommendations of the legislature-appointed Teacher Licensure Advisory Task Force to repeal the Basic Skills MTLE, an exam that candidates must pass to receive a teaching license in the state of Minnesota. Here's why we think repealing the MTLE is a good idea:

- **Passage of the Basic Skills MTLE has become the *sole* criteria for receiving a Minnesota teaching license leaving principals unable to make crucial local hiring decisions.** Even candidates with demonstrated success on additional exams relevant to their area of teaching, outstanding recommendations from supervisors, superior student teaching records, and/or years of experience in other school systems cannot teach in Minnesota if they have not passed the Basic Skills MTLE.
- **The Basic Skills MTLE is a flawed solution for a non-existent problem.** Until 2010, Minnesota had a set of licensure exams, the Praxis, that assured parents and the public that all classroom teachers had a basic level of mastery in reading, writing and math regardless of the subject they were licensed to teach. These Praxis tests (still used in the Dakotas and Wisconsin) had passing rates of 92% in math, 88% in reading and 88% in writing. After the Praxis was replaced with the MTLE, passing rates fell to 78% in math, 79% in reading and 79% in writing. Since passing the tests has become the sole criteria for entering the classroom, the legislature needs to act now to solve this problem, or we will be at risk of teacher shortages in Minnesota.
- **The "Basic Skills" MTLE is holding the wrong group of educators accountable to college-level math.** Elementary teachers continue to be tested in the math they need to teach in a K-6 classroom through subject area tests, as are Middle and High School math teachers in order to become highly qualified math teachers. Under the new MTLE so-called "basic skills" tests, however, ALL educators in ALL subject areas are barred from even entering the classroom if they cannot pass the college-level math that is included in the exam. Minnesota risks creating shortages in all Middle and High School subject areas such as art, music, foreign language, and social studies – even though teachers' college-level expertise in these areas is already required. Similarly, we are at risk of having a shortage of elementary teachers since even a kindergarten teacher is now being held hostage to college-level calculus in order to be licensed to teach our youngest children.
- **The Basic Skills MTLE has proven to be a heavily biased assessment tool.** Pass rates for teacher candidates of color or who speak English as a second language are well below those for white candidates. As we in Minnesota strive to increase the diversity of our education workforce we should not accept a biased assessment instrument to ultimately determine who will be in our children's classrooms.
- **The Basic Skills MTLE does not assess how well teacher candidates will connect with and inspire children or whether they can effectively manage a classroom of 28 students every day.** As parents and employers we want children to be educated by teachers who can inspire our children to be curious lifelong learners who will be able to adapt to changing and challenging global economic conditions. Can a timed paper and pencil test that is used as the final, and ultimately only, determinant of classroom suitability, fulfill that goal?

Recommendations from the Teacher Licensure Advisory Task Force (overwhelmingly approved by 80% of committee members)

Task Force Recommendation #1

The Task Force recommends repealing Minnesota Statutes, section 122A.09, Subdivision 4 (b) and provisions in section 122A.18 Subdivision 2 (b) that require a teacher licensure candidate to pass a skills examination in reading, writing and mathematics. These three subtests have been commonly referred to as the “basic skills” test. The task force supports the continuation of the requirement that a teacher licensure candidate pass examinations in pedagogy and content areas as approved by the Board of Teaching.

Task Force Recommendation #2

The Task Force recommends that the Board of Teaching, as part of its approval process for teacher preparation programs, develop requirements that include assurances that prior to graduation and upon successful completion of an accredited teacher preparation program, teacher licensure candidates are proficient in reading, writing and mathematics at a college entrance level.

Task Force Recommendation #3

The Task Force recommends that the Board of Teaching develop requirements for teacher licensure candidates who do not graduate from a Board-approved teacher preparation program, to demonstrate proficiency in reading, writing and mathematics at a college entrance level. The Board may consider the following ways of demonstrating proficiency:

1. A portfolio
2. edTPA
3. Other nationally normed tests
4. Coursework
5. Licensure from another state
6. Consideration of prior teaching service

Further reading

Teacher Licensure Task Force [website](#) with reports, data on testing, notes on hearings (<http://tinyurl.com/l8uazba>)

[Article](#) on the impact on Minnesota’s border towns when teaching candidates choose to teach in another state in order to avoid Minnesota’s teacher licensing tests. (<http://tinyurl.com/kac68g4>)

[Parents United for Public Schools](#) is concerned about the impact of the law on teacher quality.

MAIN recommends that when speaking to a legislator you have a personal story to tell about how the MTLT may be impacting your school. Have you lost a good teacher? Is your principal having to hire someone who is less qualified for a teaching position in your school (lower proficiency in the target language, for example), but has passed the test?

Need more information or want to talk to someone? Contact one of MAIN’s committee members.

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