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## TEACHER LICENSURE ADVISORY TASK FORCE

**Report Adopted January 16, 2014**

*Respectfully submitted to the Board of Teaching, the education commissioner, and to the chairs and ranking minority members of the Senate and House of Representatives committees and divisions with primary jurisdiction over K-12 education.*

**February 1, 2014**

## **Cost of Report Preparation**

The total cost for the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) to prepare this report was approximately \$830. Most of these costs involved staff time in analyzing data from surveys and preparing the written report. Incidental costs include paper, copying, and other office supplies.

Estimated costs are provided in accordance with Minnesota Statutes 2011, section 3.197, which requires that at the beginning of a report to the Legislature, the cost of preparing the report must be provided.

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## Background

Development of the Minnesota Teacher Licensure Examination (MTLE) began in May 2009. After a public bidding process, Pearson Evaluation Systems was awarded the contract to provide testing for Minnesota Teacher Licensure. This contract runs through 2015.

As part of this development, in August 2009 the Minnesota Board of Teaching directed that the MTLE Basic Skills Test be a “college-experienced” level exam. Work continued on the development of the test and in April 2010, field testing of the MTLE was conducted. In June 2010, standard-setting review panels of Minnesota educators were convened, and in September 2010 the MTLE was launched. The Board of Teaching adopted passing scores in October 2010.

Since the launch of the MTLE in fall 2010, the Board of Teaching has identified several areas of concern for study and change needed for the testing program. Many of those issues and changes relate to the Basic Skills Tests. Basic Skills data was examined and analyzed in the following areas:

- Overall performance data
- Performance data by ethnicity
- Performance data by registration question
- Pass rates by attempt
- Score distributions

From this data examination, feedback from teacher candidates and from teacher preparation program providers, the following changes were made:

- Additional time for Basic Skills writing
- Preliminary passing status provided
- Shortened retake windows
- Increased testing opportunities and test locations

The Board continues to address issues regarding the MTLE Basic Skills Test, including the following:

- Has the MTLE caused unintended consequences?
- Termination of teachers
- Teachers replaced with less-qualified individuals
  - Temporary licenses
  - Limited licenses
  - Substitute licenses
  - Community Expert Waivers
- Limiting the access of well-qualified candidates
  - Non-native English speakers
  - Out-of-State Licensure
  - Timed tests
  - Accommodations
  - Remediation
  - Immersion

The Board of Teaching is dedicated to assuring that Minnesota students are served by licensed teachers who are equipped to deliver effective instruction and able to meet the instructional needs of all learners. This is its primary focus and goal. In reviewing the data and the continuous improvement efforts made by many in teacher preparation, no convincing evidence was found that passage of the MTLE Basic Skills Test ensures that a licensure candidate will be an effective teacher.

## **Charge to the Task Force**

The Task Force was established to make recommendations on requirements for teacher licensure applicants to demonstrate mastery of reading, writing, and mathematics skills through nationally normed assessments, a professional skills portfolio, or accredited college coursework, among other methods of demonstrating skills mastery; and an alternative licensure pathway for nonnative English speakers seeking licensure to teach in a language immersion program. These recommendations are to be forwarded to the Board of Teaching, the education commissioner, and the education committees of the legislature (See Appendix A for the charge to the Task Force).

Current law requires the Board of Teaching (BOT) to adopt rules requiring a teacher licensure candidate to pass a skills examination in reading, writing and mathematics prior to initial teacher licensure. The law also requires colleges and universities offering BOT-approved preparation programs to provide remedial assistance to those who do not achieve a “qualifying score on the skills examination.”

This examination has been commonly referred to as the “basic skills test.” Many questions have been raised about the level of difficulty or “cut score” established for teacher licensure candidates to achieve a qualifying score, which indicates that this level is well beyond a college entrance level.

One particular issue is the impact on teacher licensure candidates for whom English is not a native language. Increasingly, schools and districts are offering immersion programs and recruiting teachers from other countries to staff these programs so the students receive instruction by teachers proficient in the immersion language.

## **Task Force Membership and Activities**

Membership on the Task Force was designated in statute (see appendix B). The Task Force held eight meetings beginning on August 1, 2013, and completed its work on January 16, 2014.

The Task Force agendas covered a variety of areas in order to fully understand the work outlined in the charge. One of the first items on the committee’s agenda was a detailed look at the current testing process. This included how the test was developed, how it is implemented, and issues around implementation including retakes and accommodations. Presentations on test development, administration, scoring and other implementation processes were made by the assessment developer.

Materials used to communicate with teacher licensure candidates to prepare them for taking the exams, instructions for test-taking and other relevant materials were also reviewed. This

included materials not only from the testing company but also those provided by the Board of Teaching and the licensing division at the Minnesota Department of Education.

The committee examined data related to test results, including the following:

1. Initial passage rates
2. Cumulative Retake Analysis
3. A demographic analysis of initial passage
4. A subtest ethnicity analysis

An integral part of the discussions was input from teacher licensure candidates who have taken the exam and college faculty from BOT-approved teacher preparation programs. Issues raised in these discussions contributed to the committee's analysis. Of particular interest to the committee was feedback received from listening sessions held with teachers and others to hear concerns about the current examination process and its implementation. One full meeting was devoted to listening to this feedback. The committee also received letters and emails offering feedback.

Finally, research, professional documents, news articles and other information was shared and discussed by the committee.

The Task Force meeting schedule and meeting documents may be found on the [MDE website](#) at the following link:

<http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/Welcome/AdvBCT/TeachLicenTaskForce/index.htm>

# Teacher Licensure Advisory Task Force Recommendations

## 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.

### **122A.09 DUTIES.**

*(b) The board must adopt rules requiring a person to pass a skills examination in reading, writing, and mathematics as a requirement for initial teacher licensure, except that the board may issue up to two additional temporary, one-year teaching licenses to an otherwise qualified candidate who has not yet passed the skills exam. Such rules must require college and universities offering a board-approved teacher preparation program to provide remedial assistance to persons who did not achieve a qualifying score on the skills examination, including those for whom English is a second language.*

*(e) The board must adopt rules requiring candidates for initial licenses to pass an examination of general pedagogical knowledge and examinations of licensure-specific teaching skills. The rules shall be effective by September 1, 2001. The rules under this paragraph also must require candidates for initial licenses to teach prekindergarten or elementary students to pass, as part of the examination of licensure-specific teaching skills, test items assessing the candidates' knowledge, skill, and ability in comprehensive, scientifically based reading instruction under section 122A.06, subdivision 4, and their knowledge and understanding of the foundations of reading development, the development of reading comprehension, and reading assessment and instruction, and their ability to integrate that knowledge and understanding.*

## **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.

### **122A.09 DUTIES.**

*(c) The board must adopt rules to approve teacher preparation programs. The board, upon the request of a postsecondary student preparing for teacher licensure or a licensed graduate of a teacher preparation program, shall assist in resolving a dispute between the person and a postsecondary institution providing a teacher preparation program when the dispute involves an institution's recommendation for licensure affecting the person or the person's credentials. At the board's discretion, assistance may include the application of chapter 14.*

## **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 in other states/countries
7. Other alternative (non-test) pathways



## Appendix A: 2013 Session – Chapter 116 Article 3, Sec. 33

### Statutory Language Establishing Teacher Licensure Advisory Task Force

Subdivision 1. Establishment and duties. (a) A Teacher Licensure Advisory Task Force is established to make recommendations to the Board of Teaching, the education commissioner, and the education committees of the legislature on requirements for: teacher applicants to demonstrate mastery of reading, writing, and mathematics skills through nationally normed assessments, a professional skills portfolio, or accredited college coursework, among other methods of demonstrating skills mastery; and an alternative licensure pathway for nonnative English speakers seeking licensure to teach in a language immersion program.

(b) Task force recommendations on how teacher candidates demonstrate skills mastery must encompass the following criteria:

- (1) assessment content must be relevant to the teacher's subject area licensure;
- (2) the scope of assessment content must be documented in sufficient detail to correspond to a similarly detailed description of relevant public school curriculum;
- (3) the scope of assessment content must be publicly available and readily accessible on the Web site of the Board of Teaching and all Minnesota board-approved teacher preparation programs and institutions;
- (4) the Board of Teaching and all Minnesota board-approved teacher preparation programs and institutions, upon request, must make available to the public at cost a written review of the scope of assessment content;
- (5) if applicable, and consistent with federal and state data practices laws including the definition of summary data under Minnesota Statutes, section 13.02, subdivision 19, the Board of Teaching and all Minnesota board-approved teacher preparation programs and institutions annually must post on their Web site up-to-date longitudinal summary data showing teacher candidates' overall passing rate and the passing rate for each demographic group of teacher candidates taking a skills assessment in that school year and in previous school years;
- (6) reliable evidence showing assessment content is not culturally biased;
- (7) the Board of Teaching and all Minnesota board-approved teacher preparation programs and institutions must appropriately accommodate teacher candidates with documented learning disabilities, including an appeals process if a request for accommodations is denied; and
- (8) if applicable, give timely, detailed item analysis feedback to teacher candidates who do not pass the skills assessment sufficient for the candidate to target specific areas of deficiency for appropriate remediation.

Subd. 2. **Membership.** The Teacher Licensure Advisory Task Force shall be composed of the following 20 members appointed by July 15, 2013:

- (1) two members of the Board of Teaching appointed by the board's chair;
- (2) two representatives from the Department of Education appointed by the commissioner of education;

- (3) two members of the house of representatives, one appointed by the speaker of the house of representatives, and one appointed by the minority leader;
- (4) two senators, one appointed by the Subcommittee on Committees of the Committee on Rules and Administration, and one appointed by the minority leader;
- (5) one elementary school principal from rural Minnesota appointed by the Minnesota Elementary School Principals Association and one secondary school principal from the seven-county metropolitan area appointed by the Minnesota Secondary School Principals Association;
- (6) one licensed and practicing public elementary school teacher and one licensed and practicing secondary school teacher appointed by Education Minnesota;
- (7) one teacher preparation faculty member each from the University of Minnesota system appointed by the system president, the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system appointed by the system chancellor, and the Minnesota Private Colleges and Universities system appointed by the Minnesota Private Colleges Council;
- (8) one member of the nonpublic education council appointed by the council;
- (9) one representative of Minnesota charter schools appointed by the Minnesota Charter Schools Association;
- (10) two representatives from the business community, appointed by the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce; and
- (11) one representative from the Minnesota School Boards Association.

Subd. 3. **First meeting; chair.** The executive director of the Board of Teaching and the commissioner of education jointly must convene the task force by August 1, 2013, and shall appoint a chair from the membership of the task force.

Subd. 4. **Report.** By February 1, 2014, task force members must submit to the Board of Teaching, the education commissioner, and to the chairs and ranking minority members of the senate and house of representatives committees and divisions with primary jurisdiction over K-12 education their written recommendations on requirements for teacher applicants to demonstrate mastery of reading, writing, and mathematics skills and for an alternative licensure pathway for nonnative English speakers seeking licensure to teach in a language immersion program.

Subd. 5. **Sunset.** The task force shall sunset the day after submitting the report under subdivision 6, or February 2, 2014, whichever is earlier.

Subd. 6. **Support.** The executive director of the board and the commissioner of education must provide technical assistance to task force members upon request.

Subd. 7. **Board of Teaching rules.** The Board of Teaching must consider the recommendations of the advisory task force and adopt revised rules by January 1, 2015, governing the skills portion of the teacher licensure exam.

**EFFECTIVE DATE.** This section is effective the day following final enactment.

## **Appendix B: Teacher Licensure Advisory Task Force Membership**

### ***Co-Chairs***

**John Bellingham**, Teacher; Chair, Minnesota Board of Teaching; Faribault  
Representing: Board of Teaching (BOT)

**Dr. Christopher Smith**, Assistant Professor; Augsburg College; Minneapolis  
Representing: Minnesota Private Colleges Council

### ***Members***

**Joshua Alexander, Ed.D.**, Principal; McGuire Middle School; Lakeville  
Representing: Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP)

**Nancy Antoine**, Elementary Principal; Bridgewater Elementary School, Northfield  
Representing: Minnesota Elementary School Principals Association (MESPA)

**James Barnhill**, Minnesota Board of Teaching  
Representing: Board of Teaching (BOT)

**Jim Bartholomew**, Education Policy Director; Minnesota Business Partnership  
Representing: Chambers of Commerce

**Joyce Bauman**, Teacher; Cold Spring Elementary, Cold Spring  
Representing: Education Minnesota (EdMN)

**Senator Kevin Dahle** (Northfield)  
Representing: Minnesota Legislature

**Dan DeBruyn**  
Representing Minnesota Association of Charter Schools (MACS)

**Representative Sondra Erickson** (Princeton)  
Representing: Minnesota Legislature

**Steve Hornstein**, Professor; Inter Faculty Organization; St. Cloud State  
Representing: Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU)

**Scot Hovan**, Physics/Engineering Teacher; Mahtomedi High School  
Representing: Education Minnesota (EdMN)

**George Kimball**, School Board Treasurer; White Bear Lake Area Schools  
Representing: Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA)

**Dr. Bob Klindworth**, Minnesota Nonpublic Education Council; North Mankato,  
Representing: Nonpublic Education Council

**Deborah Luedtke**, Supervisor, Division of School Support  
Representing: Minnesota Department of Education (MDE)

**Senator Sean Neinow** (Cambridge)  
Representing: Minnesota Legislature

**Dr. Susan Ranney**, Senior Lecturer; University of Minnesota  
Representing: University of Minnesota (U of M)

**Amy Walstien**, Director, Education Policy; Minnesota Chambers of Commerce  
Representing: Chambers of Commerce

**Richard Wassen**, Director, Teacher Licensure  
Minnesota Department of Education  
Representing: Minnesota Department of Education (MDE)

**Representative Barb Yarusso** (Shoreview)  
Representing: Minnesota Legislature

***Staff***

**Karen Balmer**, Director; Board of Teaching (Through August)

**Rose Hermodson**, Special Assistant to the Commissioner  
Minnesota Department of Education

**Kevin McHenry**, Assistant Commissioner  
Minnesota Department of Education

Materials from this Task Force may be found on the [MDE website](#) at the following link:

<http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/Welcome/AdvBCT/TeachLicenTaskForce/index.htm>

## Dissenting Report Teacher Licensure Advisory Task Force

As part of the 2013 Education Finance bill (Chapter 116), the legislature and governor:

- a. temporarily suspended the requirement that new teachers must pass basic skill exams in reading, writing and math to earn a Minnesota license; and
- b. created a task force to examine and make recommendations for either maintaining the exams, or possible alternatives.

As members of the task force we believe the recommendation to permanently eliminate the basic skills exam requirement is a serious mistake, and puts Minnesota out-of-step with state and national efforts to raise expectations for new teachers.

Alternatively, we recommend the legislature and governor accept the offer by the exam vendor (Pearson) to work with the Board of Teaching to review all concerns with the exams, and make changes, if necessary – at no cost.

For nearly 30 years Minnesota has been able to assure parents, students and the public that all licensed classroom teachers have attained a basic level of mastery in reading, writing and math. In fact, as recently as 2012, Governor Dayton signed a bill that was passed by votes of 132 – 0 in the House of Representatives, and 60 – 1 in the Senate that required new teachers to pass basic skill exams before they could earn a license.

Nationally, 41 states require new teachers to pass basic skill exams, with 24 of those states requiring candidates to pass the exams prior to entering into a teacher preparation program. In many cases, these 41 states have also moved to increase their expectations (e.g. Iowa, Illinois, Virginia).

Internationally, a report by McKinsey found top performing education systems identify candidates before they enter teacher preparation programs based on:

- a. *a high overall level of literacy and numeracy;*
- b. *strong interpersonal and communications skills; and*
- c. *a willingness to learn and the motivation to teach.*

**Background.** Through an RFP process, the Board of Teaching selected Pearson to develop new teacher licensure exams, including basic skill exams. These new exams, the Minnesota Teacher Licensure Exam (MTLE), replaced the Praxis exams, effective in 2010.

Minnesota teachers and higher education faculty were significantly engaged throughout the development of the MTLE. For example, teachers and faculty served on panels that selected exam questions, reviewed questions for bias and recommended exam passing scores. In fact, the panels' recommended passing scores for the basic skill exams were adopted by the Board of Teaching.

A key change with the MTLE basic skill exams is the increased expectation for reading, writing and math skills. The Praxis 1 exams had a passing score set to the equivalent of a high school graduate. The MTLE's expectations were set at a "college experienced" level, or roughly a second year college student.

From our perspective, expecting new teachers to be able to pass an objective exam of basic skills at an early college level is reasonable. It should also be noted the percent of candidates passing the exams has increased over time as candidates become more familiar with the new expectations.

Opponents of the MTLE basic skill exams have argued too many teacher candidates haven't been able to pass because of issues such as:

- a. culturally biased exam questions;
- b. special needs accommodation policies are unclear;
- c. a lack of information is provided with exam results; and
- d. exam questions are too difficult.

Not only did the exam vendor (Pearson) meet with the task force to discuss how the development of the MTLE exams met all industry standards, but they also answered member questions about the above issues. In addition, Pearson submitted a written proposal (attached) to work with the Board of Teaching to review remaining questions and if necessary make changes to the MTLE exams – all at no cost to the state. Unfortunately, the task force failed to discuss Pearson's offer.

We have two responses to the recommendation that teacher preparation programs simply assure the Board of Teaching that teacher candidates will graduate "proficient in reading, writing and math at a college entrance level".

- a. College graduates should be able to read, write and do math at a level higher than someone beginning college.
- b. History shows that without a basic skill exam requirement, some teacher candidates will graduate and be eligible for a license without adequate skills in reading, writing and math.

For example, according to a 2010 Board of Teaching report of Praxis 1 exam results from 2001 – 2009:

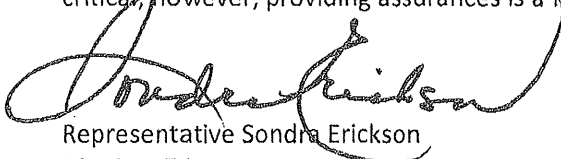
- 6,240 candidates failed the reading exam on their first attempt (16% of all exam takers);
- 6,468 candidates failed the writing exam on their first attempt (16%); and
- 4,019 candidates failed the math exam on their first attempt (10%).

Had the requirement that new teachers pass the Praxis 1 exams - set at a high school level - not been in place it's entirely possible that many of those who didn't pass would be in our children's classrooms.

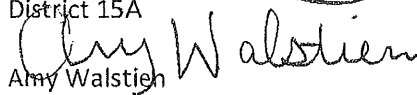
Frankly, we believe the task force had a clear bias against using any objective exam of basic skills to determine if a teacher candidate should be eligible for licensure. For example, the option of using student ACT scores (ACT's college ready benchmark) as an alternative was raised, but rejected, as was Pearson's offer to work with the Board of Teaching on possible - free - modifications to the MTLE.

The task force's recommendation to eliminate basic skill exams is an over-reaction, and is out-of-step with efforts by other states and organizations to raise expectations for educators. Having a nationally-recognized, third-party exam of new teacher competency in the basic skills is important – not just as a safeguard for students, but as part of an overall strategy to elevate the teaching profession.

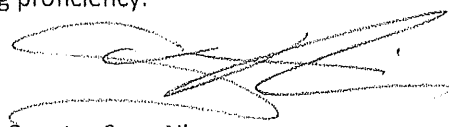
With respect to the task force's second recommendation that the Board of Teaching develop requirements for teacher preparation programs to provide assurances that candidates are "proficient in reading, writing and math at a college entrance level", we feel that greater emphasis on strengthening teacher preparation is critical, however, providing assurances is a far cry from requiring proficiency.



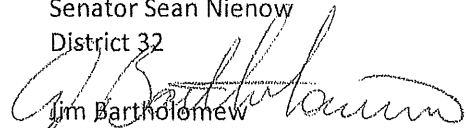
Representative Sondra Erickson  
District 15A



Amy Walstien  
MN Chamber of Commerce



Senator Sean Nienow  
District 32



Jim Bartholomew  
MN Business Partnership  
Appointee, MN Chamber of Commerce

## EVALUATION SYSTEMS

300 Venture Way  
Hadley, MA 01035  
T: (413) 256-0444  
F: (413) 584-7579

[www.pearsonassessments.com/teacherlicensure.html](http://www.pearsonassessments.com/teacherlicensure.html)

Evaluation Systems group of Pearson, the Minnesota teacher licensure testing provider, would like to offer the following constructive changes to the Basic Skills Assessment of the Minnesota Teacher Licensure Examinations (MTLE).

Pearson is committed to improving teacher licensure testing in Minnesota and is prepared to respond positively and energetically to the recommendations recorded by the members of the Basic Skills Task Force. Accordingly, Pearson, with the Board of Teaching's oversight and direction, is prepared to assemble committees of Minnesota educators to revise the Basic Skills Assessment of MTLE by:

- Reviewing the Basic Skills test content and objectives and their alignment to the Minnesota College and Career Readiness initiatives, including the level of the test content of the mathematics assessment
- Updating the test content and objectives followed by developing new test questions, as needed, to reflect the new test content and objectives
- Reviewing all test questions, both new and existing, to prevent potential bias
- Setting a new passing score for each basic skills test in reading, mathematics and writing which will be responsive to the Task Force's expectations for Minnesota's teacher candidates

In addition, the Board of Teaching has received a commitment from Pearson to:

- Strengthen the application process for testing accommodation requested by candidates; review and improve the appeals component of the process, and clarify the communication about the process to candidates
- Increase preparation materials for basic skills and better communicate their availability
- Increase helpful score reporting materials for Minnesota teacher candidates
- Review and expand helpful score reporting data for Minnesota's teacher preparation programs and the Board of Teaching as well as better communicate the availability of data-
- Respond to immersion candidates' topics with suggestions for new policies

Pearson will implement these changes at no cost to the state.

We urge your support for these suggested plans to address topics mentioned by the Task Force and for undertaking substantive steps to revise the Basic Skills Assessments of the MTLE program.

The quality of teaching of Minnesota children is directly related to the quality of the teacher in the classroom. Pearson is committed to supporting Minnesota in its initiatives to license the highest quality teachers for its children.