



The Merits of Teaching Preparation Grounded in Equity: Critical Components for Developing and Retaining Educators who are Responsive to Minnesota's Diverse and Complex Communities

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Executive Summary

Scholars and national stakeholders have long praised Minnesota for having both high professional standards for educators and high student achievement. At one time, Minnesota was committed to building and sustaining a professional, well-trained, and appropriately compensated teaching workforce to serve students. However, in 2017, Minnesota's state lawmakers made sweeping changes to our teacher licensure laws. The 2017 change dramatically reduced the requirements to teach in Minnesota classrooms. Minnesota has now shifted from being among the states with the most stringent requirements for teacher licensure to being among the states with the lowest standards for teacher licensure. This has dramatic implications for Minnesota's students, especially students of color.

**Teacher preparation matters. Ill-prepared teachers
harm students, schools, and communities.**

Minnesota needs to confront the inequity that is woven throughout the entire education system. All stakeholders, unions, districts, policymakers, and administrative groups, need to realize previous methods of training teachers have harmed and ignored students of color and low-income communities. However, lowering the bar for entry into the classroom is the wrong way to go about correcting the deep injustices of education inequity. Instead, stakeholders must collectively agree to transform the teacher preparation system in a way that preserves the common good of free public education. All parties must strive to build and sustain a system that serves all students and the future citizens of Minnesota.

We offer this paper to promote our vision of how policymakers can seize the opportunity given to us by the 2017 legislative changes.

We must learn from the other states that have already traveled this path, so we can use this moment to correct the inequities of the past and prevent future harm.

Teacher preparation, not on the job training, is critically important to student achievement and success.

With that, we argue that all future teachers in Minnesota, the candidates from both traditional Institutes of Higher Education and those from alternative pathways, must receive quality training in:

- content knowledge and content-specific methodology
- childhood development, including social-emotional learning and trauma-informed practices
- classroom management, student behavior, and restorative practices
- the multi-faceted levels of assessment that can determine student success
- working with diverse learners
- the legal and pedagogical connections between special education and general education
- actual instructional practice by having multiple, rigorous and diverse clinical experiences

The remainder of this summary will highlight our key findings and arguments by answering the following questions:

1. What drove the legislative change? Was there a problem with the status quo?
2. Does teacher preparation really affect student academic achievement?
3. Why are these seven core components important for future teachers and students?
4. How can lawmakers and stakeholders act on this opportunity?

A. WHAT DROVE THE LEGISLATIVE CHANGE? WAS THERE A PROBLEM WITH THE STATUS QUO?

During the 2017 legislative session, the Minnesota Legislature changed licensure requirements, and the state now has some of the most relaxed standards in the nation. This change is a reflection of decades of intentional efforts on the part of motivated stakeholders committed to de-professionalizing the teaching profession and weakening the quality of public education. Richard Ingersoll (2007) has pointed out that the parties committed to an agenda of deregulation have been at work for two decades altering the way nations and states train teachers with, “alternative certification programs, whereby college graduates can postpone formal education training, obtain an emergency teaching certificate, and begin teaching immediately” (Ingersoll, 2007, p. 2).

Most proponents of measures like our 2017 legislative change mask their motives with faux concerns about the nationwide and ever-worsening shortage of qualified teachers. We agree that there is an acute shortage of licensed teachers in Minnesota classrooms. However, we disagree with the stakeholders arguing that lowering the requirements for teaching licenses will be the solution to attracting more people to the profession. Minnesota has a “teacher retention” problem.

They did not leave because of challenging standards or licensing loopholes.

More than 50,000 licensed teachers in the state are not working in classrooms. This majority of trained teachers have left the profession because of efforts to devalue the profession and the public school system.

We also agree that the status quo needed reform. First, Minnesota always ranks among the states with the highest levels of student academic achievement, but it also possesses one of the largest achievement gaps between students of color and white students.

Alternative routes to licensure that take massive shortcuts around the essential preparation all teachers need are not the answer. Structural racism has led to the achievement gap, and this 2017 statutory change gives teacher educators, lawmakers, and stakeholders a vital opportunity to begin the work of correcting the systemic inequities that pervade every aspect of Minnesota's civic and public life. Any new teaching preparation program in this state, IHE based or non-IHE based, must train new teachers to be social justice educators committed to challenging systems of oppression and lifting up all students. Teacher preparation programs must be spaces dedicated to building equity-minded, culturally conscious educators.

History and research has shown that eliminating teacher preparation and certification requirements exacerbate, rather than eradicate, inequities.

B. DOES TEACHER PREPARATION REALLY AFFECT STUDENT ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT?

Yes, teacher preparation matters. Educators with proper training have better success in the classroom and produce higher achieving students as measured by academic assessments.

Research has shown for decades that teacher effectiveness has a strong effect on student outcomes. Several peer-reviewed, academic scholars have confirmed that teacher effectiveness is one of the most important factors that improve student academic achievement (Sanders & Rivers, 1996; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997; Jordan, Mendro, & Weerasinghe, 1997, qtd. in Darling-Hammond, 2000, pp. 2-3). A properly trained teacher is more likely to improve academic achievement in his or her students.

In addition, education researchers have also built a strong body of evidence to show that a lack of teacher preparation leads to negative outcomes for students. Unfortunately, improperly trained teachers usually end up working in schools that serve the most vulnerable students (Sanders & Rivers, 1996, qtd. in Darling-Hammond, 2000, "Previous Research," para. 1). Ashton (1996) has argued that states' efforts to reduce teacher certification requirements "no doubt contribute to students' academic failure" (p. 21). She has also stressed, "that these policies exacerbate inequities in the quality of education offered to low-income children in comparison to children from more economically advantaged homes. Teachers without regular certification are more often assigned to teach in schools with predominantly low-income children and children of color than are regularly certified teachers" (Ashton, 1996, pp. 2-3).

We know our detractors have counter-arguments they use to challenge the importance of teacher education. Corporate stakeholders, looking to deregulate teaching preparation to promote quick Band-Aid solutions to systemic problems, cling to (1) Goldhaber and Brewer's (2000) "Does Teacher Certification Matter: High School Teacher Certification Status and Student Achievement," (a study commissioned by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation) and (2) Kate Walsh's (2001) "Teacher Certification Reconsidered," (commissioned by the Abell Foundation). Academic scholars, publishing in peer-reviewed journals, have consistently highlighted the flaws and political and corporate biases within these two papers.

For example, in "Research and Rhetoric on Teacher Certification: A response to 'Teacher Certification Reconsidered'," Darling-Hammond (2002), offers one of the most profound critiques of the Walsh/Abell paper. She wrote, "[The Walsh/Abell report] suggests that its recommendations are based on 'solid research.' However, only one reference among the report's 44 footnotes is to a peer-reviewed journal article (which is mis-quoted in the report)." (p. 3).

Teacher preparation matters. The best education systems in the world also have a strong, public commitment to building and sustaining a professional teaching workforce.

C. WHY ARE THESE SEVEN CORE COMPONENTS IMPORTANT FOR FUTURE TEACHERS AND STUDENTS?

Teaching candidates in Minnesota will now have the option to attend a traditional IHE based preparation program, or they can follow the alternative paths that will enter the marketplace. Some of these alternative pathways will be incomplete and cause more harm. Others will be better avenues for non-traditional and second career teaching candidates. However, we stress that all teaching preparation programs in this state, both the current programs tied to IHEs and the new alternative pathways, must embrace a critical race, equity lens and prepare future teachers for the demands of the profession. At minimum, there are seven core components, all rooted in an equity lens, that must be present in any successful teaching preparation program.

COMPONENT #1: ALL TEACHING CANDIDATES NEED TRAINING IN CONTENT KNOWLEDGE AND CONTENT-SPECIFIC METHODOLOGY.

We concur with Grossman, Schoenfeld, & Lee (2005), who echo the findings of multiple researchers when they assert that "at a minimum, prospective teachers need a solid foundation in the subject matters they plan to teach and the requisite disciplinary tools to continue learning within the subject matter throughout their careers" (p. 206). Content and content-specific pedagogy are interrelated and highly complex and they are critical components of teacher preparation. Teachers must know both subject matter and how to deliver that content knowledge to students.

COMPONENT #2: TRAINING IN CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES.

An understanding of childhood development and childhood psychology are profoundly important tools for teachers. Researchers continue to learn about childhood development. Future educators must know the current research on childhood development, and they must be able to continue building on this knowledge. Understanding a variety of theoretical approaches to development, social emotional learning, and trauma-informed practice are vital elements of teacher knowledge and skill sets.

Child and adolescent development “is the most solid and substantial basis upon which to build curricular, assessment, and teaching skills . . . with child development as a common core of training” (Elkind, 1998, p. 186). Preparation programs must help future teachers develop understandings of brain development and student growth (Daniels & Shumow, 2002, p. 516).

COMPONENT #3: TRAINING IN CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT, STUDENT BEHAVIOR, AND RESTORATIVE PRACTICES.

One of the most fundamental tools any teacher needs from the first day is a solid background in classroom management and a deep understanding of student behavior and restorative practices. This area of training has a wildly disparate history in traditional teacher preparation programs. Alternative pathways to teacher preparation often ignored this topic. This is problematic for the students of Minnesota. A teacher with strong classroom management skills is more likely to be effective in classrooms.

In addition, Losen (2011), with the National Education Policy Center, has shown that there is clear racial inequity in the use of school suspensions and punitive interventions. Scholars now speak of “a growing racial discipline gap” for students of color (Losen, 2011, p. 5). There are ways to end this inequity, but it starts by training all future teachers in the best practices connected to classroom management, student behavior, and restorative practices.

COMPONENT #4: TRAINING IN ROBUST AND MULTI-FACETED ASSESSMENT.

All future teachers need to be prepared to use and understand student assessment data because this information is used for a variety of professional evaluation purposes. All training programs must help new teachers understand (1) formative and summative assessment used to both improve learning and determine grades or establish final scores (Shepard et al., 2005, p. 297) and (2) prior knowledge assessments used to determine a student’s knowledge of a subject.

In addition, teachers need to understand the harm that assessments can cause to students and student learning. Students can be internally motivated, seeking to master content. Students can also be externally motivated, seeking rewards. These two types of motivation can be very much at odds. The recent federal focus on high-stakes standardized tests have ushered in complaints about teachers “teaching to the tests,” which is another way of saying that policy has lead us away from providing students with an environment that helps develop and nurture internal motivation to master content.

COMPONENT #5: TRAINING ON TEACHING DIVERSE LEARNERS.

The racial and ethnic diversity of children and families has increased in almost all states, including Minnesota. The vast majority of teachers across the country, however, are mostly white and middle class (U.S. Department of Education, 2016, p. 6). In addition to racial and socioeconomic diversity, families across the country are becoming more diverse in a wide variety of other ways. The number of students who are learning English as a second language has grown dramatically, as has the diversity in the range of academic abilities within classrooms (Banks et al., 2005, p. 232).

Cultural differences between teachers and students have enormous and far-reaching implications for teaching and learning. A lack of understanding of students' cultural context can result in a misinterpretation of student behavior, leading to measurably higher rates of special education referrals and higher rates of inappropriate and unhelpful disciplinary interventions (Brown, Vesely, & Dallman, 2016). It is imperative that all teacher candidates must begin what needs to be an on-going, career-long process of developing cultural competency before they begin their work as teachers (Brown, Vesely, & Dallman, 2016, p. 76). Culturally responsive teaching goes far beyond curriculum and methodology. As Banks et al. (2005) have explained, "Teachers need to be aware of...family and community values, norms, and experiences, so that they can help to mediate the 'boundary crossing' that many students must manage between home and schools" (p. 233). Preservice teachers need robust training about diverse learners in order to begin this critical work.

COMPONENT #6: TRAINING IN SPECIAL EDUCATION.

All preservice teachers need better training in the area of special education. Darling-Hammond, Wei, and Johnson (2009) studied graduates of traditional teacher preparation programs and found that only "60-70%...felt well prepared to meet the needs of special education students and students with limited English proficiency" (Darling-Hammond, Wei, & Johnson, 2009, p. 630). Traditional preparation programs tied to IHEs struggle to prepare new teachers for the challenges of working with special education students. We worry that accelerated alternative pathway programs will fail at even greater rates when it comes to preparing future teachers to work with special education students.

We echo the work of scholars like Miller (1991) who have long championed the important fact that "special education and regular education should not be two separate systems, but should be integrated to provide the best possible services for the benefit of all children" (p. 19-20). New teachers need training in (1) accommodations and modifications, (2) the legal requirements of an individual education plan, and (3) the connections between socioemotional learning and disability categories. Preservice teachers need training in these areas; they do not need to learn "on the job" while working with Minnesota's special education students.

COMPONENT #7: CLINICAL EXPERIENCE TIED TO THEORY AND BUILT ON COLLABORATION.

The clinical experience for preservice teachers is so critical that it needs to be both intensive and extensive. Multiple clinical settings can give preservice teachers a much more diverse set of tools and experiences, and a substantial commitment of time is critical if we aim to create the collaborative relationships necessary for growth and learning. Banks (2014) calls for field experiences that “allow teacher candidates to apply their pedagogical content knowledge in a variety of settings” (p. 62). In Darling-Hammond’s 2006 study of seven teacher preparation programs that are outperforming most others, one of the common characteristics was not just that the clinical experiences were carefully integrated with the curriculum, but it was also that the clinical experience itself was extensive—30 weeks or longer.

D. HOW CAN LAWMAKERS AND STAKEHOLDERS ACT ON THIS OPPORTUNITY?

Minnesota needs to seize this opportunity and protect future students. This will require:

- Closing the loophole in Minnesota’s tiered licensure system that allows a candidate to attain a Tier 3 license without having completed teacher preparation.
- Providing financial support and other resources to Tier 1 and Tier 2 teachers to move through teacher preparation programs.
- Investing resources in higher quality and collaborative relationships between teacher preparation programs and school districts.
- Fully funding public institutions of higher education in the form of subsidizing free/affordable college education, tuition tax relief, and education debt relief.
- Increasing teacher salaries to incentivize long-term commitments to our most diverse and our most impoverished schools.
- Building grow-your-own programs that provide educational support professionals quality pathways to become licensed teachers.
- Supporting research about how Minnesota teacher preparation programs can achieve better results for a diverse demographic of teacher candidates.
- Expanding the Minnesota Teacher Loan Repayment Program by providing adequate funding and broadening eligibility requirements to include school counselors, school nurses, school social workers, school psychologists, speech language pathologists, school-based occupational therapists, and other support personnel.

Minnesota is at a critical juncture for our students. We must decide if our children—all of our children—deserve the best, most highly prepared educators or if they deserve less. Our children deserve more than cheap-and-easy proposals that do not address the roots of the inequities and injustices in our education system. They deserve highly trained, skilled, and professional educators that will inspire them to be the creators of our new century.

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