



Building an Equitable School System for All Students and Educators

Section 6

Teacher Preparation



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The Teacher Preparation Team

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Darci Stanford is an early childhood education faculty at South Central College. In 2015, she was honored as the faculty of the year. She has completed all but her dissertation in early childhood education from Concordia University, Chicago. She holds an Ed.S. in Educational Leadership from Minnesota State University, Mankato and a M.S. in Family and Consumer Sciences from South Dakota State University. In addition to service at the college, Darci was elected to a 3-year term as a statewide vice president for the Minnesota State College Faculty union and currently serves on the negotiations team. In her free time, Darci is a certified indoor cycling instructor and enjoys teaching cycling classes, hiking with her family, and attending her children's extracurricular events.



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Introduction

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. While those high standards correlated to high levels of overall student achievement, they did not serve to mitigate our achievement gap, which remains more than problematic; it is, in fact, devastating for thousands of children, their families, and the future of our communities.

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.

In 2017, Minnesota's state lawmakers made sweeping changes to our teacher licensure laws. 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. Before these changes went into effect, it was our students of color, our special education students, and our students in high poverty districts who were most likely both to be taught by teachers teaching outside of their licensure area or without any license at all and to be in schools with the highest rates of teacher turnover. By creating a path to full, professional licensure without any teacher preparation at all, the Minnesota Legislature has all but guaranteed that the problem of inequity will become even more firmly entrenched.

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All Minnesota public school students deserve to be taught by teachers who have had robust pedagogical and content-specific training. We will not solve problems of inequity and teacher attrition by lowering standards and avoiding the policies and structures that cause these problems. Minnesota should require teacher preparation for all of its licensed teachers, and we should require that all Minnesota-approved teacher preparation programs meet minimum benchmarks for best practices.

Much of the conversation during hearings in the 2017 legislative session focused on the teacher shortage, and many lawmakers accepted without question the narrative that the only way to help districts hire when they have a hard time finding qualified applicants was to lower the requirements for teacher licensure. However, the narrative of the teacher shortage is largely a myth. It is true that districts have an increasingly difficult time finding fully prepared and licensed teachers when they post open positions. We have a critical and acute shortage of teachers of color. It is not true, however, that Minnesota has a teacher shortage overall. It is simply not true that the reason districts have a hard time finding fully prepared people to take teaching jobs is because it has become too hard to become a teacher in Minnesota. That myth was perpetuated at the Capitol with such regularity that too many adopted it as truth.

It takes roughly 63,000 licensed educators to fully staff Minnesota's public and charter schools. If we had a real teacher shortage, one might expect that we have fewer than 63,000 licensed teachers. But, in fact we have more than twice that number of already licensed teachers in the state right now. According to the most recent *Teacher Supply and Demand Report*, there are currently 133,945 people with active Minnesota teaching licenses (Wilder Research, 2019, p. 3). That number does not include people who only have a short-call substitute license. Because Minnesota once issued something called a lifetime license, it is important to also pay attention to the age of those 133,945 license holders. If we subtract from that number everyone over the age of 60 and roughly 10,000 people for whom no birthdate data is available, we get to 91,500. That is, there are over 91,000 people under the age of 60 who have active Minnesota teaching licenses in at least one specific licensure field. It takes 63,000 to fully staff our schools.

It is not a shortage of teachers that leads to districts being unable to find qualified applicants for jobs. We have more than enough licensed teachers already. But we do have a horrendous teacher attrition rate, a pattern that some are calling a mass exodus from the profession.

It is not a shortage of teachers that leads to districts being unable to find qualified applicants for jobs. We have more than enough licensed teachers already. But we do have a horrendous teacher attrition rate, a pattern that some are calling a mass exodus from the profession. One out of every three teachers leaves the profession in the first five years. That is an attrition rate unlike any other like field. We do not have a teacher shortage, except for our very critical shortage of teachers of color. We have a shortage of teachers who are willing to stay in the profession, given what we have done to the profession.

Minnesota's shortage of teachers of color is one of the worst in the nation. Though our student population is made up of 33.5% students of color (identified as American Indian, Asian, Black, Hispanic, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and multiracial), only 4.3% of our teaching workforce is made up of teachers of color (Wilder Research in collaboration with the Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board, 2019, p. 4). The percentage of students of color has been increasing steadily over time. The percentage of teachers of color has not. Further, teachers of color are leaving the profession at a rate 24% higher per year than their White counterparts (Ingersoll & May, 2016).

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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, Institute of Higher Education (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.

Ingersoll and May (2011) outlined three reasons often cited for why the mismatch between teachers of color and students of color is detrimental. These include: 1) Demographic parity. This argument holds that "minority teachers are important as role models for both minority and White students." 2) Cultural synchronicity. This argument "holds that minority students benefit from being taught by minority teachers because minority teachers are more likely to have 'insider knowledge' due to similar life experiences and cultural backgrounds." 3) Candidates of color. "This argument holds that candidates of color are more likely than non-minority candidates to seek employment in schools serving predominantly minority student populations, often in low-income, urban school districts," which are the schools that suffer disproportionately from teacher shortages (Ingersoll & May, 2011, p. 11). Achinstein et al. (2010) cited the increasingly large body of research showing that teachers of color "can produce more favorable academic results on standardized test scores, attendance, retention, advanced-level course enrollment, and college-going rates for students of color than White colleagues" (Achinstein et al., 2010, p. 7). Many other scholars "contend that this demographic gap creates a teaching-learning disconnect that contributes to the too-often dismal academic performance, high dropout rates, and low graduation rates of diverse urban students" (Waddell & Ukpokodu, 2012, p. 16).

Burciaga and Kohli (2018), explained further what teachers of color bring to students. They bring “knowledge and skills cultivated by communities of color to resist and survive racism” (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018, p. 6). Minnesota needs to get serious about increasing the numbers of teachers of color in our teaching workforce, which will mean looking honestly at the structural racism inherent in our current school systems, and it needs to get serious about the teacher attrition problem overall, which is wreaking havoc on our districts and leaving too many students without teachers trained to meet their educational needs.

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

1. content knowledge and content-specific methodology;
2. childhood development, including social-emotional learning and trauma-informed practices;
3. structural racism, cultural responsiveness, and critical thinking in regard to the myriad ways in which our schools normalize and value whiteness;
4. classroom management, student behavior, and restorative practices;
5. the multi-faceted levels of assessment that can determine student success;
6. working with diverse students;
7. the legal and pedagogical connections between special education and general education, including training on why students of color are over-identified as needing special education services;
8. actual instructional practice by having multiple, rigorous, and diverse clinical experiences;

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

Teacher Preparation and 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.

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, & Weersinghe, 1997; Darling-Hammond L. , Teacher quality and student achievement: A review of state policy evidence, 2000). A properly trained teacher is more likely to improve academic achievement in his or her students.

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.

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; Darling-Hammond L. , Teacher quality and student achievement: A review of state policy evidence, 2000). 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).

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

Mandatory Components for All Teacher Preparation Routes

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.

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

We concur with Grossman, Schoenfeld, and Lee (2005), who echoed the findings of multiple researchers when they asserted 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).

People of color interested in teaching are more likely than their White counterparts to identify social justice as a driving factor for their desire to teach.

COMPONENT #3 TRAINING ON STRUCTURAL RACISM, CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS, AND CRITICAL THINKING IN REGARD TO THE MYRIAD WAYS IN WHICH OUR SCHOOLS NORMALIZE AND VALUE WHITENESS.

If we hope to move the needle on the number of teachers of color in Minnesota, both at the stage of recruitment and at the critical stage of retention, we have to acknowledge why they are not flocking to the profession already. And there is no shortage of data or research on this topic. People of color interested in teaching are more likely than their White counterparts to identify social justice as a driving factor for their desire to teach. And time and again, when teachers of color leave the profession, they cite an inability to change the structures that so disadvantage children of color. Burciaga and Kohli (2018) explained the complexity of inequity in our schools:

Research has demonstrated time and again that educational outcomes are intimately tied to structurally driven opportunities to learn (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Oakes, 2005). For students of color, these opportunities are endemically inequitable. That is, students of color are more likely to be placed in schools that have fewer curricular resources (Burciaga, Perez Huber, & Solorzano, 2010), larger class sizes, and high teacher and administrative turnover (Orfield & Lee, 2005). Racial bias in teacher preparation and in schools also manifests itself by centering whiteness in a myriad of ways (Sleeter, 2017), including textbooks that privilege Eurocentric perspectives (Calderon, 2014), standardized tests that are ‘normed to white, upper middle class performance’ (Guinier, 2015, p. 20), pedagogies that negatively impact students’ academic performance (Jacoby-Senghor, Sinclair, & Shelton, 2016), and punishments that feed the school-to-prison pipeline (Simmons, 2016). [...]. Even desegregation efforts prioritized whiteness—moving Black children to White schools and firing thousands of Black teachers. With such drastic neglect of the socio-historical factors that perpetuate inequitable educational conditions, and the normalization and mainstream nature of whiteness in schools—what Urrieta (Urrieta, 2010) calls ‘whitestream’—it is no wonder we tend to prepare and

support teachers based on White middle class notions of teaching and learning (Walker, 2009). (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018, p. 6).

Graduates of teacher preparation programs should know these dynamics, should be able to identify them in a school setting, and should be given strategies to be change agents throughout their careers.

COMPONENT #4: 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.

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.

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.

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.

COMPONENT #5: 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 (Shephard, 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 #6: TRAINING ON TEACHING DIVERSE STUDENTS.

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 (United States 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).

There is "a national awareness about the disparity in academic achievement between students of color and White students (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018, p. 6). However, these disparities are often reasoned as inherent deficiencies and presented as immutable facts (Valencia, 2002).

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, Vesley, & Dallman, 2016). This happens because there is a dominant narrative which tells us that communities of color carry "inadequacies (e.g., lack motivation, value for education) that are attributed to race, poverty, culture, or inadequate socialization from home" (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018, p. 6). In fact, a study by Sleeter (2017) found that teachers were more likely to cite student and family deficiencies instead of reflecting upon their own deficit-oriented beliefs about students of color (Sleeter, 2017).

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.

With an "it's not me, it's the students" mindset, teachers absolve themselves of their responsibilities as educators. As such, our schools mirror society by operating as color-blind meritocracies in which cultural differences can be read as deviance from whitestream norms and values" (Burciaga & Kohli, 2018, p. 6).

It is imperative that all teacher candidates must begin what needs to be an ongoing, career-long process of developing cultural competency before they begin their work as teachers (Brown, Vesley, & 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).

New Minnesota statute requires that licensed teachers complete training in cultural competency for every stage of licensure renewal. The Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (PELSB) has adopted rules that define that training as one that, at a minimum,

promotes self-reflection and discussion including but not limited to all of the following topics: racial, cultural, and socioeconomic groups; American Indian and Alaskan native students; religion; systemic racism; gender identity, including transgender students; sexual orientation; language diversity; and individuals with disabilities and mental health concerns. Training programs must be designed to deepen teachers' understanding of their own frames of reference, the potential bias in these frames, and their impact on expectations for and relationships with students, students' families, and the school communities. (Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board, 2019)

Clearly, there is an expectation by the state that teachers be involved in deepening their awareness of cultural issues, their own biases, and how those biases affect their interactions with students throughout their careers. Such training should begin in teacher preparation programs. Preservice teachers need robust training about diverse students in order to begin this critical work.

COMPONENT #7: TRAINING ON THE LEGAL AND PEDAGOGICAL CONNECTIONS BETWEEN SPECIAL EDUCATION AND GENERAL EDUCATION, INCLUDING TRAINING ON WHY STUDENTS OF COLOR ARE OVER-IDENTIFIED AS NEEDING SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES.

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" (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.

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.

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” (pp. 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.

Preservice teacher training should include a critical look at the problem of the over-identification of students of color as needing special education services in exclusive settings.

Further, preservice teacher training should include a critical look at the problem of the over-identification of students of color as needing special education services in exclusive settings. The federal mandate that students be taught in the least restrictive environment depends on trained educators who know developmental, cultural, and trauma-informed norms for the populations they are serving. The lack of teacher preparation coursework in existing programs is correlated to the over-identification of students for exclusive special education settings. Attempting to solve the problem of the “shortage” of special education teachers by requiring even less preparation—in fact, by requiring none—is the antithesis of a logical approach to this problem. Address the needs of teachers so that there is no longer a critical shortage of special education teachers, but maintain high standards for the educators doing that work.

COMPONENT #8: 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.

Given the fact that 96% of Minnesota’s teachers are White, and that well over 30% of Minnesota students are students of color, it is imperative that teacher candidates’ clinical experiences include time in schools with diverse students.

Given the fact that 96% of Minnesota’s teachers are White, and that well over 30% of Minnesota students are students of color, it is imperative that teacher candidates’ clinical experiences include time in schools with diverse students. Some teacher preparation programs, such as those at Winona State University, already hold methods classes in actual K-12 buildings. This is a great start, and we hope to see more programs follow their lead. But Minnesota also needs to get serious about helping teacher preparation programs and K-12 schools develop better partnerships so that teacher candidates can have student teaching experiences at a variety of schools serving a variety of student and family demographics.

Proposed Solutions

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, so that teacher preparation programs can be better integrated in K-12 schools and so that student teachers placements reflect rich and diverse experiences.
- 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 impoverished schools.
- Building more grow-your-own programs, such as the University of Minnesota’s MNGOT program, that provide education support professionals quality pathways to become licensed teachers. New programs should include viable paths to licensure for ESPs who do not yet have bachelor’s level degrees. Our own Minnesota State is perfectly situated to develop these programs in partnership with K-12 districts.
- 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.

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.

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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