

Education Minnesota

Educators call for restoration of high standards for earning a Minnesota teaching license

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ST. PAUL, Minnesota. March 4, 2019 – Current and future Minnesota educators testified Monday in favor of amending the state’s 2017 licensure law to insure people hired as teachers have adequate levels of training in their content area and pedagogy, or the art and science of teaching children.

“Generations of Minnesota parents could trust that their children’s teachers were among the best qualified in the United States,” said Denise Specht, the president of Education Minnesota, who did not testify. “That changed two years ago. Monday’s hearing was about adding some transparency and guardrails to this radical redefinition of what it means to be a teacher.”

In 2017, the Legislature created four tiers of teaching licenses. Tier 4 licenses went to current teachers with formal training in their content area and relevant pedagogy, such as developmental psychology and classroom management.

The two-year-old law also created a path to a permanent teacher’s license with no training in pedagogy, requiring only passing scores on two tests and a single methodology course. Despite the significant change, the law does not require administrators to inform parents about the qualifications of their child’s teacher.

More than 1,000 educators had contacted their legislators in support of House File 1329, which makes several changes to the licensure law, by the time the House Education Policy Committee heard testimony on the bill Monday morning. Those changes include:

- Closing the loophole that allows a candidate to attain a Tier 3 license with no more than a single class in teaching, but no requirement for classes in child psychology, classroom management or content.
- Limiting Tier 2 eligibility to individuals who are actively working toward a Tier 3 license, such as educators in “grow your own” programs.
- Eliminating the link between a teacher’s summative evaluation to their licensure status because no single supervisor should have that much power over an employee.
- Requiring districts and charter schools to make a public report to the state about the number of teachers at each tier in each building.
- Permitting Tier 1 teachers to join the teacher bargaining unit so that they may negotiate together for the time and resources they need to move up the tiers.

Dennis Draughn, a high school social studies teacher in the Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan school district, told the committee that he unequivocally rejected the claim that lowering standards was the only way to attract more teachers of color like him.

“Some say the new licensure law will attract much-needed teachers of color to the profession by not requiring them to go through teacher preparation training. But using that as an excuse to lower standards is unacceptable and insulting,” he said. “We hold high expectations for students in the classroom and we should also expect the same in terms of our practice.”

Abby Kelley-Hands, a licensed special education teacher, told the committee the law permits people without the appropriate training to work with students with the most needs.

“Special education teachers are supposed to deliver developmentally appropriate programming that is grounded in evidence-based practices. They have to write individual education plans – which are legally binding documents – for their students,” Kelley-Hands testified. “Now, they can be doing all this without ever taking a child psychology or behavior management course.”

Katie Lillis, an elementary education major at Minnesota State University-Moorhead, said her husband was working toward a mechanical engineering degree. With that degree, he could apply for a teaching license and eventually reach the same level of licensure she will. She speculated about what would happen if she tried to apply her training to his profession.

“There’s no way I would be hired as a mechanical engineer – and rightfully so,” she said. “My future customers would be horrified to learn I had no training in engineering, just as I expect parents will react when they learn more about what this law did to teaching.”

Angela Osuji, a licensed chemistry, physics and physical science teacher in the Minneapolis public schools, who also holds a Ph.D. in science education, testified about the documented benefits to students of highly qualified teachers.

“Teacher preparation – not just on-the-job training – is critically important to student achievement and success,” she said. “Sixty years of academic research has shown that students have better outcomes when they learn from educators who have rigorous preparation, in both content and the art and science of teaching.”

About Education Minnesota

Education Minnesota is the voice for professional educators and students. Education Minnesota’s members include teachers and education support professionals in Minnesota’s public school districts, faculty members at Minnesota’s community and technical colleges and University of Minnesota campuses in Duluth and Crookston, retired educators and student teachers. Education Minnesota is affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers, National Education Association and AFL-CIO.

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