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## **Alternative Pathways to Teacher Preparation**

### **January 2019**

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A report submitted in accordance with Minn. Stat. § 122A.2451, Subd. 9(b)

## Introduction

The Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board is submitting this report in accordance with Minn. Stat. § 122A.2451, Subd. 9(b).

During the 2011 legislative session, the Minnesota Legislature authorized the development of alternative teacher preparation programs in an effort to expand pathways toward teacher licensure in Minnesota, improve racial and cultural diversity in Minnesota's teacher workforce, and close student achievement gaps.

The now-defunct Board of Teaching began work in response to the legislation, but Minnesota statutes continued to have several confusing and competing requirements for teacher preparation providers seeking to develop approved alternative pathways for teacher licensure. As part of the requirements, alternative teacher preparation providers needed to partner higher education institutions from 2011 to 2017 (i.e., traditional teacher preparation providers) in order to ensure that candidates completing an alternative pathway could receive a recommendation for teacher licensure.

In 2017, the Minnesota Legislature amended statutes to clarify the processes, terms, and criteria for alternative teacher preparation providers. The Legislature's most significant change to law was the removal of the partnership requirement. The 2017 legislation also provided \$750,000 in grant funding for alternative pathway providers to seek unit approval and develop teacher preparation programs.

With the dissolution of the Board of Teaching, the Minnesota Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (PELSB) now oversees all teacher preparation providers within the state. PELSB continues to work with alternative pathway providers to ensure they are meeting the necessary standards for teacher preparation unit and program approval.

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## Background

In order to offer teacher preparation, whether traditional or alternative, in Minnesota, a provider must first receive approval from PELSB as a “unit” by meeting high standards for organizational operation, teacher preparation design, and fiscal solvency. These standards are enumerated in [Minn. Rules 8705.1000](#).

To initiate the approval process, the provider submits a written application providing evidence of meeting the required unit standards. PELSB staff members then coordinate an on-site visit with the provider, which includes a team of external reviewers who conduct in-depth interviews and listening sessions to confirm the evidence in the provider’s written application and verify that all necessary standards are met. Once the site visit is complete, the review team provides a recommendation to PELSB for whether approval should be granted. The full Board then makes a final determination on unit approval.

Providers must also seek approval for each licensure program that it will offer for teaching candidates. The provider is required to submit documentation and evidence that its program will meet the specific licensure standards for that program. PELSB staff members coordinate an external program review team who reviews the program application. The review team then provides a recommendation to PELSB for whether approval should be granted. The full Board then makes a final determination on licensure program approval.

As of Dec. 31, 2018, five organizations seeking to offer alternative teacher preparation pathways were at different stages in the approval process, but all were moving toward becoming operational. PELSB staff members have worked closely with these organizations that started the approval process in 2018, which includes coordinating with organizations receiving alternative teacher preparation grant funds from the Office of Higher Education grant management division. Board staff have held several group and individual training and support sessions to advise organizations and to listen to concerns about the unit and program approval process.

The five organizations undertaking the unit and program approval application processes include:

- Lakes Country Service Cooperative
  - Lakes Country Service Cooperative plans to operate additional licensure programs in career and technical education. It received unit approval in October 2018, becoming the first alternative pathway provider in Minnesota. LCSC is currently working on submitting applications for licensure program approval.
- TNTP
  - TNTP completed a unit site visit in November 2018 as part of its unit approval application process. The review team’s recommendation for TNTP appeared before the Board on Jan. 11, 2019. TNTP has begun submitting applications for licensure program approval.

- Learning Disabilities Association of Minnesota
  - The Learning Disabilities Association of Minnesota has submitted applications for licensure program approval. As of Jan. 1, 2019, the applications were being considered by external review teams. PELSB staff have also scheduled a site visit in March 2019 as part of the unit approval application process.
- Southwest/West Central Service Cooperative
  - PELSB staff have scheduled a site visit for July 2019 as part of the unit approval application process. The SW/WC Service Co-Op has not yet submitted any applications for licensure program approval.
- Teach for America
  - Teach for America contacted PELSB in late 2018 to indicate its interest in seeking unit approval. PELSB staff have tentatively scheduled a site visit in the summer of 2019. TFA has not yet submitted any application for licensure program approval.

## Future of Alternative Pathways

PELSB continues to provide logistical support to all organization seeking teacher preparation unit and program approval. This includes working closely with the Minnesota State system on developing efficient transfer pathway opportunities among community colleges and state universities, working with aspiring alternative pathway providers, and collaborating with established teacher preparation providers to create new and innovative licensure programs.

PELSB supports continued grant funding from the state legislature that will help establish and enhance innovative teacher preparation opportunities in Minnesota. PELSB maintains that alternative teacher preparation pathways can diversify Minnesota's teacher workforce and fill gaps in regions and licensure areas that have faced shortages of well-qualified licensed teachers.

The Board views the availability of alternative teacher preparation pathways as an integral component of the newly-implemented tiered licensure system. These alternative pathways provide individuals who become Minnesota educators as Tier 1 or Tier 2 teachers with the opportunities and support to advance through the tiered licensure system with options that can meet their learning styles, physical locations, schedule limitations, and financial constraints.

PELSB also formally opened rulemaking in September 2018 to consider changes to teacher preparation unit and program rules to better align with the standards and approval processes that the Minnesota Legislature created in 2017. As part of this rulemaking effort, the Board is working closely with stakeholders to adopt rule changes that will establish unit standards with consistent language and scope that fit both traditional and alternative teacher preparation providers. PELSB's rulemaking will also focus on developing rules that establish clear and transparent unit and program approval processes that ensure high quality preparation for Minnesota's teachers.