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Alternative Pathways to Teacher Preparation

May 2021

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 with 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. The 2014-adopted standards are enumerated in [Minn. Rules 8705.1000](#), and 2021-adopted standards are enumerated in [Minn. Rules 8705.1010](#).

The Board’s recently adopted unit and program rules that went into effect on May 1, 2021. The goals of the rulemaking included:

- To establish a single set of standards that are inclusive of all teacher preparation provider types
- To establish standards and processes for approving providers that offer licensure programs that only meet a subset of standards
- To remove or modify standards that are overly burdensome or hamper innovation
- To update, clarify, and streamline existing standards in an effort to eliminate redundant requirements and enhance transparency
- To separate and reorganize existing multifaceted standards into discrete, measurable standards
- To align rule with shifts in the field of teacher preparation, including the design of high-quality, authentic clinical experiences
- To acknowledge national accreditation in an effort to reduce provider workload and reduce redundancies
- To update and clarify the program approval process (both the initial approval process and the ongoing (“continuing”) approval process)
- To encourage continuous improvement while requiring greater accountability
- To establish a clear and transparent discretionary variance process

Under newly adopted rule, to initiate the approval process, a provider submits a notice of intent and submits a written application or self-study describing and providing evidence of meeting the unit standards. Then, a peer review team provides feedback around any gaps in the self-study. Next, the provider has an opportunity to address deficiencies in an addendum. Finally, the peer review team looks at unit records and conducts interviews of teacher educators, advisory groups, school partners, cooperating teachers, administration, current candidates, and former candidates. Once the site visit is complete, the review team provides a recommendation to the Board for whether approval should be granted. The full Board 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 makes a final determination on licensure program approval.

Current Status of Alternative Pathways

As of April 26, 2021, there are four organizations approved to offer alternative teacher preparation programs.

The following are PELSB-approved preparation providers with PELSB-approved programs:

- Lakes Country Service Cooperative
 - Lakes Country Service Cooperative was granted unit approval in October 2018, becoming the first alternative pathway provider in Minnesota.
 - LCSC has four approved additional licensure programs: CTE Transportation Careers, CTE Manufacturing Careers, CTE Construction Careers, and Work-Based Learning
 - In the 2019-2020 academic year, there were 9 candidates enrolled in Lakes Country Service Cooperative programs.

- TNTP
 - TNTP received initial unit approval in July 2019.
 - TNTP has two approved initial licensure programs: Elementary Education and Academic and Behavioral Strategist.
 - TNTP intends to enroll candidates in the 2022-2023 school year.

- Learning Disabilities Association of Minnesota
 - LDA MN received initial approval in June 2019.
 - LDA MN has one initial licensure program: Academic and Behavioral Strategist.
 - In the 2019-2020 academic year, LDA MN had 4 candidates enrolled.

- Southwest/West Central Service Cooperative
 - The SW/WC Service Co-Op received initial unit approval March 2020.
 - SWWC has two approved additional to Academic Behavioral Strategist (ABS) programs: Autism Spectrum Disorders and Emotional or Behavioral Disorders.
 - SWWC hopes to enroll candidates in the summer of 2021.

PELSB staff members are also working closely with multiple organizations, including a few that plan to have unit site visits in the 2021-2022 academic year. 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.

Future of Alternative Pathways

PELSB continues to provide logistical support to all organizations seeking teacher preparation unit and program approval. This includes working closely 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.