Minnesota Association of Colleges for Teacher Education

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MACTE Minute – February 2014
MACTE Priority Issues for the 2014 Legislative Session

One of MACTE's goals is to increase participation in legislative and policy-making processes by developing clear and informative statements about issues important to our work in preparing highly qualified professional educators to serve all learners. This year, the MACTE representatives have identified the following four priorities for the upcoming legislative session:

Assessments for Teacher Licensure
In addition to assessments required for admission and continuing progress in teacher preparation programs, teacher candidates currently must complete at least three Minnesota Teacher Licensure Examination (MTLE) tests (Basic Skills, Pedagogy, and Content) and the edTPA (Teacher Performance Assessment), a performance-based assessment. Problems with some tests persist and are preventing teacher candidates who demonstrate competence on other measures from attaining licensure.

Achievement Gap
Analyses of student performance in Minnesota and across the country have demonstrated a gap in the achievement of students on the basis of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, and first language. This gap is represented in several related, but different, outcomes. The outcomes include performance on achievement tests, graduation rates, drop-out rates, and in college and career readiness as measured by rates of application, acceptance, attendance, and completion of some form of postsecondary education. Some have suggested that these issues are better identified as gaps in opportunity than achievement.

Building a Diverse Teaching Force
The success of efforts to close the student achievement gap may depend in part on our ability to attract, prepare, and retain a more diverse teaching force in communities across the country. Several studies highlight the impact on student learning of a teacher cadre that is reflective of the student body.

Alternative Pathways to Teacher Licensure
In recent years, much discussion has focused on the quality of teachers and the type of preparation needed to meet the diverse needs of our nation's students. Policy discussions regarding all pathways to licensure need to focus on research-based components and curricular designs that assure effective preparation in line with Minnesota standards, produce effective student outcomes, and focus on long-term retention of our most effective teachers.

We have prepared statements for each priority that include descriptions of the issue, key points, and MACTE recommendations. We believe that the concise statements will be valuable when discussing the priority issues with partners and other stakeholders.

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2014 Policy Issue: Assessments for Teacher Licensure

Brief Description of Issue: Teacher candidates in Minnesota are required to complete an array of assessments. In addition to assessments required for admission and continuing progress in teacher preparation programs, teacher candidates currently must complete at least three Minnesota Teacher Licensure Examination (MTLE) tests (Basic Skills, Pedagogy, and Content) and the edTPA (Teacher Performance Assessment), a performance-based assessment. Problems with some tests persist and are preventing teacher candidates who demonstrate competence on other measures from attaining licensure. These problems led the 2013 Minnesota Legislature to direct formation of a Teacher Licensure Task Force charged with learning more about current testing procedures and problems and developing recommendations for future testing requirements.

Key Points:

- **Passing test scores need careful evaluation before results are used for high-stakes decision-making**. The Board of Teaching (BOT) initially set passing scores for some tests higher than was recommended by test designers, psychometricians, and educators and did not follow its past practice of holding candidates harmless until tests could be sufficiently evaluated. Based on actual test administration, the BOT has now set cut scores for all tests at the recommended levels.
- **A number of factors have significant impact on candidates as they seek to complete and pass all required tests.** Specifically:
    - **Access to appropriate and timely test supports are essential to an effective testing program.** In particular, specific information about the depth and breadth of knowledge covered in the tests and specific feedback to candidates and faculty is essential to offer state-required remediation to candidates who do not achieve a passing score.
    - **Students must be able to take tests at convenient times and locations.** The testing system must take into account the "rhythm" of work, classes, and field experiences.
    - **Timed tests pose an additional problem for many students.** In the absence of evidence of psychometric or educational value of time limits, adjustments need to be made to ensure that test scores measure skills and knowledge, not processing speed.
    - **Accommodations must be made for documented disabilities and non-native English speakers.** Too many requests for accommodations have been denied.
- **The possibility of cultural bias in current tests has become increasingly clear based on test results and vendor and candidate testimony shared with the Teacher Licensure Task Force.** Students who are otherwise competent, especially those of color or who are not native English speakers, are at a disadvantage. This barrier is in direct conflict with the state's need for a more diverse teaching force.

Recommendations:

- As recommended by the Teacher Licensure Task Force, the legislature should repeal MS 122A.09 Subp4(b) and MS 122A.18 Sub2(b); the BOT should include assurances of appropriate proficiency in reading, writing, and mathematics within its program approval process; and the BOT should define multiple means by which teacher candidates who have not graduated from a BOT-approved program can demonstrate proficiency in reading, writing, and mathematics.
- The Board of Teaching should continue to assess the purpose, costs, appropriate uses, reliability, and predictive validity of assessments as it develops and implements rules and requirements for teacher candidates, with particular attention to the appropriate uses of assessments for used for consequential employment decisions related to licensure.

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2014 Policy Issue: Closing the Achievement Gap

Brief Description of Issue: Analyses of student performance in Minnesota and across the country have, in recent years, consistently demonstrated a gap in the achievement of students on the basis of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, and first language Perhaps the most commonly cited gap is in test score performance, with majority group students outperforming other student groups on achievement tests. There are also documented gaps in graduation rates, drop-out rates, and in college and career readiness as measured by rates of application, acceptance, attendance, and completion of some form of postsecondary education. Some suggest that these issues are better identified as gaps in opportunity than achievement.

Key Points:

- **The most powerful influence on a student's opportunity to learn, affecting 60% of their achievement, is the student's family, community, and socio-economic context.**
- **Good teaching is one of several school factors that have a powerful influence on student achievement.** In order to narrow current gaps of opportunity and achievement, teachers must have the skills, knowledge, dispositions, practices, and resources needed to effectively reach and teach all learners. While effective initial preparation for licensure is essential to prepare a teaching force to reach and teach all students, on-going learning opportunities through mentoring, induction, and professional development and adequate resources with which to teach are critical.
- **Evidence shows that the teaching cadre needs to better reflect the make-up of the student population**. As a result, effective efforts to recruit, support, prepare, license, and retain teachers from non-traditional and marginalized communities are essential to helping all learners succeed.
- **Strong leadership; curricula that prepare students for college and career readiness and life-long learning; safe and appropriately equipped classrooms; and parent participation programs are also necessary components for helping all students achieve to their full potential.** Funding, while not all that is needed to support these learning components, is essential.
- **Although assessments like the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) demonstrate an achievement gap, NAEP scores in reading and mathematics for 2013 show that Minnesota has made significant progress in narrowing the achievement gap between white students and students of color**. We can also lose sight of the gains made by all groups of learners when we focus only on gaps between groups. Diane Ravitch has noted, "If white achievement had stood still, the achievement gap would be closed by now, but of course white achievement has also improved so the gap remains large" (Ravitch, 2013).
- **One factor often cited to bolster the idea of an opportunity, more than an achievement, gap is the growing income gap.** Too often, schools serving large numbers of low-income students also have the largest numbers of inexperienced teachers and inadequate resources. Although effective teaching can help address this gap, social and economic policies and funding to support changes for the 23% of US children living in poverty are also essential.

Recommendations:

- Support programs committed to recruiting, supporting, preparing, licensing, and retaining a more diverse teaching force for Minnesota classrooms.
- Offer incentives to attract and retain experienced, highly effective teachers to work in the most racially and culturally diverse and economically challenged schools.
- Assure that policies to reduce opportunity gaps address and fund educational, social, and economic needs as a unified approach.

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2014 Policy Issue: Building a Diverse Teaching Force

Brief Description of Issue: The success of efforts to close the student achievement gap may depend in part on our ability to attract, prepare, license, and retain a more diverse teaching force in communities across the country. Several studies highlight the impact on student learning of a teacher cadre that is reflective of the student body. Unfortunately, the number of teachers of color lags behind the increasingly diverse student population across the nation. In 2012, 96% of Minnesota teachers were white, compared with a student population in which 73.7% of P-20 students were white.

Key Points:

- **According to the Center for American Progress (2011), the student body in the nation's public schools will no longer reflect a clear racial or ethnic majority within about a decade.** By contrast, teachers of color represent only about 17 percent of the total U.S. teaching cadre.
- **Research studies have identified the importance to students to have teachers of their own race/ethnicity to serve as role models.** Findings indicate that students of color achieve higher levels of performance on various measures of academic outcomes when taught by teachers of color (CAP, 2011; Dee, 2004; Villegas & Lucas, 2004).
- **Research also points to benefits to students of color when taught by teachers who share their social and cultural background** and who, as a result, may have more connections with their students; have greater respect for students' cultural, community, and familial knowledge; and use culturally relevant pedagogy that focuses on high student expectations (Milner & Howard, 2004; Milner, 2006).

Recommendations:

- **Provide financial support and incentives (e.g., loan forgiveness, grants, and scholarships) to enable a more diverse group of individuals to complete teacher preparation programs leading to licensure, including student teaching**. Such assistance can help attract, prepare, license, and retain adult learners who cannot stop working to pursue teaching credentials, particularly during student teaching and other clinical experiences. One model is the Teaching Fellows Program developed by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education.
- **Provide financial support and incentives to teacher preparation programs to enable them to attract, prepare, license, and retain teacher candidates of color**. Selective funding of some programs is a start and additional support is needed.
- **Provide alternative pathways by which paraeducators can prepare and become licensed as teachers**. This could be an effective way to transition individuals from underrepresented groups with a commitment to education into the teaching profession.
- **Mandate that assessments required for licensure are bias-free.** The Board of Teaching should monitor assessment results on the basis of race and ethnicity to assess the extent to which the tests are bias-free.
- **Provide outreach and mentoring to middle/high school students as a means to recruit a diverse group of high-quality candidates to teacher preparation programs**, perhaps through a partnership among the Minnesota Department of Education, the Minnesota Board of Teaching, and the Minnesota Association of Colleges for Teacher Education.

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2014 Policy Issue: Alternative Pathways to Teacher Licensure

Brief Description of Issue: In recent years, much discussion has focused on the quality of teachers and the type of preparation needed to meet the diverse needs of our nation's students. One result has been increased attention to alternative pathways to teacher licensure. Colleges and universities have responded with new models, including post-baccalaureate and "Fast Track" licensure programs and programs embedded into P-12 schools that deepen clinical experiences and tap the expertise of teachers and administrators. However, since the academic growth of students taught by some alternatively certified teachers has been called into question, in part because of small gains in achievement often lost through high teacher attrition and turnover, policy discussions regarding all pathways to licensure need to focus on research-based components and curricular designs that assure effective, standards-based preparation; produce desired student outcomes; and focus on licensure and retention of our most effective teachers.

Key Points:

- **Minnesota's licensure structure has long enabled multiple pathways to licensure.** In 2011, the Minnesota legislature set benchmark standards for alternative teacher preparation programs and directed the Minnesota Board of Teaching to establish a process for approving these alternative programs.
- **Many alternative pathways focus on areas of teacher shortage.** In Minnesota, there are few areas of teacher shortage, with the exception of math, science and special education. New special education licensure rules and programs may reduce those shortages.
- **Some alternative pathways to licensure provide candidates with very brief periods of preparation in teaching methods prior to being placed in classrooms as the "teachers of record"** without a co-teaching supervisor or regular mentor. These candidates function as classroom teachers while they complete their preparation; learning effective teaching strategies, classroom management strategies, and other essential skills needed to meet the Minnesota Standards of Effective Practice. Not all alternative pathway candidates complete licensure preparation during their work as the teacher of record.
- **Many research studies have compared the effectiveness of traditionally and alternatively prepared teachers.** Results continue to indicate that licensed teachers who remain in teaching past three years outperform unlicensed teachers. The studies are inconclusive about which aspects of alternative licensure programs might assure effective long-term student achievement.
- **Alternatively prepared teachers are placed disproportionately in hard-to-staff urban schools, often by design.** While some suggest that this improves teacher quality in urban schools, others have demonstrated that this practice is increasing the extent to which urban learners are disproportionately taught by under-prepared teachers, and the practice leads to increasing the turn-over rate of teachers which results in low student achievement.

Recommendations:

- Require alternative pathways in Minnesota to meet the same, high standards to which traditional programs are held; provide the same extensive documentation about candidate performance; and complete the same rigorous and regular approval process.
- Require that any alternative licensure program approved to operate in Minnesota be actively partnered with an approved Minnesota postsecondary preparation program.