



Minnesota Board of Teaching

Staffing for Discipline and Ethics Responsibilities July/August 2013

Context:

Investigating possible breaches of teacher ethics is one of the foundational responsibilities of the Minnesota Board of Teaching (BOT). The BOT was initially established in 1967 to develop a code of ethics for teachers and "...to provide measures through which the observance of such standards by the members of the profession may be promoted and enforce." Investigating and resolving teacher ethics claims is critical to maintaining a safe environment for all Minnesota children. As such, the Board should strive to continually increase its effectiveness in dealing with teacher ethics claims.

We believe that all students have the right to a safe learning environment and ethical educators.

It is the responsibility of the BOT to ensure that all reports are thoroughly investigated and resolved within a reasonable timeframe. Due to current staffing and budgetary constraints, the BOT is unable to maximize its effectiveness and responsiveness to teacher disciplinary issues. There are ten states with independent standards boards, and three others with advisory boards that deal exclusively with teacher discipline. Comparing Minnesota to these similar states will help to shed light on the efficacy of our current system.

Findings:

Table 1: States ranked by teacher to ethics staff ratio

State	# Teachers under purview*	Staff	Teachers : Staff
Wyoming	7,127	2	3,564
Oregon	28,109	7	4,016
Kentucky	42,042	7	6,006
California	260,806	31	8,413
Georgia	112,460	13	8,650
Delaware	8,933	1	8,933
Hawaii	11,396	1	11,396
Iowa	34,642	3	11,547
Minnesota	52,672	1	52,672

Table 1 shows staffing in terms of the ratio of licensed K-12 public school teachers in the state to staff dedicated to ethics and teacher discipline issues at the corresponding board. When looking at sheer number of teachers compared to staff responsible for investigating their ethics, Minnesota comes in dead last. Teacher numbers alone, of course, do not tell the whole story. Volume of reports and claims varies greatly from state to state. Figure 2 compares states based on their caseload and the ratio of case to staff.

Table 2: States ranked by case to ethics staff ratio

State	# Teachers under purview*	Cases per year (2012 unless otherwise noted)	Staff	Cases : Staff
Hawaii	11,396	4	1	4 : 1
Wyoming	7,127	23	2	12 : 1
Iowa	34,642	133	3	44 : 1
Oregon	28,109	378	7	54 : 1
Georgia	112,460	813	13	63 : 1
Delaware	8,933	75	1	75 : 1
Minnesota	52,672	100	1	100 : 1
California	260,806	5,723 (2009/10)	31	185 : 1

Again, Minnesota falls nearly to the bottom of the pile with only one dedicated staff member responsible for an average of 100 cases per year. With such an overwhelming case load, we cannot hope to perform at our most efficient. Hawaii, for example, is able to resolve most ethics claims within 90 days. Statutory language in Iowa requires cases to be resolved within 180 days without specific board approval, which is generally only necessary when criminal charges are pending. In Minnesota, on the other hand, complicated cases can last over a year. To maintain a safe and ethical teaching force is a central mission of the BOT and current staffing limits the responsiveness and efficacy of ethics investigations.

Objective:

To promote a safe environment for all students by ensuring that reports of teacher ethics violations are investigated in an efficient and timely manner.

Suggestions for consideration:

- Increase staffing to provide more effective and efficient resolution of claims.
- Provide funding for upgrades to technology and infrastructure to streamline the processes and reduce the current potential security risks.

Rationale:

Minnesota lags behind comparable states when we consider both the teaching population and average caseload. States with the most comparable teacher populations, such as Oregon and Kentucky, both have seven ethics FTEs on staff. Iowa, with only three FTEs, still eclipses Minnesota's one. When we consider caseload, Iowa is again very similar with 133 cases reported in 2012. Ranked by caseload, Minnesota rates below all other comparable states except California. The other states with only one ethics FTE deal with significantly smaller teacher populations and caseloads. By increasing the FTEs devoted to ethics, we will be better able to serve the state of Minnesota, protect Minnesota students, and uphold Board statute and the Code of Ethics for Minnesota Teachers (Minn. Rule 8700.7500).

Potential Benefits:

- Decrease the average duration of investigations, which means more expeditious resolution of highly sensitive situations that impact Minnesota kids.
- Allow staff greater opportunity to focus and dig deep into a smaller number of cases rather than tasking one staff member with juggling around 100 cases at any given time.