

10 WAYS TO TACKLE MINNESOTA'S TEACHER SHORTAGES

A MINNCAN POLICY PAPER

Minnesota is facing critical teacher shortages. A 2015 Minnesota Department of Education report revealed that while special education positions are the hardest to fill, schools are feeling hiring pressure in many fields. In the past two years, about one in five public school administrators found it very difficult to staff high school chemistry, math and physics positions. The same goes for filling early childhood education openings.¹

To fill these positions, Minnesota districts often hire teachers who are licensed in another field, or who have subject matter expertise but lack a full teaching license, such as out-of-state educators and community experts. In 2013–14, districts hired 1,685 teachers using personnel variances² and the Board of Teaching granted 3,504 special permissions for teachers who were not fully licensed—approximately six percent of the teacher workforce.³

The shortage is exacerbated by both teacher attrition and declining enrollment in teacher preparation programs. Between 2008–09 and 2012–13, statewide teacher preparation enrollment dropped by 40 percent and program completion dropped by 35 percent.⁴ **Fortunately, state leaders can take a variety of steps to address growing teacher shortages.**

1 Encourage teacher preparation programs to match teacher supply with demand. Teacher shortages are being felt most deeply in rural and northern Minnesota,⁵ and they are most acute in high school STEM and special education. At the same time, teacher preparation programs are overproducing in some fields, like elementary education.⁶ The state must incentivize teacher preparation programs to align their programming and enrollment as much as possible with Minnesota’s workforce demands, and hold traditional preparation programs accountable for system-wide outcomes.

2 Expand alternative pathways to teaching. In 2011, the Minnesota Legislature passed a law allowing the creation of alternative teacher preparation programs to attract more and diverse leaders to the teaching profession.⁷ However, barriers in both state policy and practice, from the application process to the requirement that all programs be developed in partnership with a college or university, make

it difficult for such programs to innovate or open. Minnesota can help address its teacher shortage by both removing barriers and providing supports for alternative certification programs, including: clarifying basic standards and processes, funding the expansion of programs that have a strong track record of producing diverse educators, recruiting or replicating alternative teacher preparation programs that have been successful in other states and allowing school districts, public charter schools and nonprofits to operate programs independently, as many other states allow.⁸

3 Streamline the licensure process for out-of-state teachers. Recent changes to Minnesota law require licensing agencies to streamline the licensure process for out-of-state teachers. The Legislature must ensure that these agencies implement improvements with urgency and fidelity, creating clear state standards that honor teachers' out-of-state training and experience. This would allow school administrators, many of whom cite onerous requirements for out-of-state teachers as a barrier to hiring, to recruit from other states more confidently, and would allow out-of-state teachers to apply for jobs and a license with a corresponding level of confidence.⁹ With growing teacher shortages across the country, this policy is not a panacea. It is, however, an important step to ensure educators, especially those who are underrepresented and in shortage fields, who move to Minnesota are not barred from classrooms that need them.

4 Re-think caps on personnel variances and limited licenses. When districts cannot find a fully licensed teacher, they may request a special permission to hire a teacher using a personnel variance¹⁰ or a temporary limited license.¹¹ However, variances and limited licenses are valid for one-year and may only be renewed three times (or four times, in select cases), even when the district lacks a more qualified replacement. The Legislature should ensure that arbitrary caps are not exacerbating shortages by forcing educators, especially those who can demonstrate content and pedagogy expertise and are working toward a professional license, out of high-need fields prematurely.

5 Improve the process for hiring community experts. Districts may also request special permission to hire unlicensed community members with expertise in subject areas.¹² Although the state is required to consider a range of factors in reviewing requests to hire community experts, there are few concrete criteria or procedures guiding the process. Clarifying and improving the approval process

would ensure the quality of community experts, provide more certainty to districts and empower hiring managers to recruit and retain community experts when needed.

6 Study teacher licensure exam requirements. About 63 percent of public school administrators and 73 percent of teacher preparation providers agree that current testing requirements exacerbate shortages.¹³ What’s more, research shows that licensure exams keep some effective teachers out of the classroom.¹⁴ The Legislature must study how to evaluate teachers’ readiness and implement relevant, aligned exams. Improving these exams must be combined with other steps to help curb shortages.

7 Offer scholarships or loan forgiveness to prospective shortage area teachers. Approximately two-thirds of teacher preparation administrators cite the cost of higher education and need for scholarships as a barrier to preparing teachers in shortage areas.¹⁵ One way to help preparation programs attract candidates to shortage areas is to create scholarships or loan forgiveness programs—as other states have done for educators willing to teach in geographic and licensure shortage areas.¹⁶

8 Raise base pay and attract teachers to shortage areas with pay differentials. Higher salaries would attract more individuals to the profession,¹⁷ while likely reducing teacher turnover.¹⁸ Moreover, targeted financial incentives could help attract candidates to hard-to-staff positions.¹⁹ Such “compensating differentials” are commonplace in other sectors, such as medicine and the military,²⁰ and already exist for teachers in shortage areas in 15 states as of 2013.²¹ Minnesota can offer these incentives directly, or expand Q-Comp to help districts offer them.

9 Improve working conditions. In addition to wages, working conditions rank among the most important factors in recruiting and retaining teachers.²² Incentivizing districts or preparation programs to create more robust teacher induction and mentoring programs can help teachers start on the right foot. The state might also incentivize districts to develop advancement opportunities and leadership roles for teachers, possibly by expanding Q-Comp further. Such leadership opportunities are proven to make it more likely for educators, particularly high-performing ones, to stay and grow in their professions.²³

Collect more data on teacher attrition, preparation and licensure.

Of the nearly 6,000 Minnesota teachers who left their jobs in 2012–2013, 22 percent left for “personal reasons,” 26 percent retired and 12 percent left for unknown reasons.²⁴ If MDE captures more detailed data on why teachers leave the profession, advocates and policymakers can find targeted solutions to retain those educators. It is also crucial to understand how well teacher preparation programs—traditional and alternative—prepare their graduates. This is why programs must publicly report information on teacher candidate outcomes, disaggregated by race. Finally, the state should collect and report more detailed data on why licensure candidates are denied standard professional licenses—a key to improving teacher recruitment.

1 Teacher Supply and Demand: Fiscal Year 2015 Report to the Legislature,” Minnesota Department of Education (January 2015), p. 25–27, accessed December 2, 2015, <http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/Welcome/Legis/LegisRep/>.
2 Teacher Supply and Demand,” pp. 21–22.
3 Teacher Supply and Demand,” pp. 2 & 22.
4 2014 Title II Reports: Minnesota,” U.S. Department of Education, accessed December 4, 2015, <https://title2.ed.gov/Public/Home.aspx>; “Preparing and Credentialing the Nation’s Teachers: The Secretary’s Ninth Report on Teacher Quality,” U.S. Department of Education (2013), accessed December 4, 2015, <https://title2.ed.gov/TitleIIReport13.pdf>.
5 For example, Northwest and Arrowhead saw special permission increases of 19% and 7% respectively between 2008–09 and 2013–14. “Teacher Supply and Demand,” p. 24.
6 Teacher Supply and Demand,” p. 3; see also, “Student Teaching in the United States,” National Council on Teacher Quality (July 2011), pp. 17–18, accessed December 4, 2015, http://www.nctq.org/dmsView/Student_Teaching_United_States_NCTQ_Report.
7 Minnesota Statutes 122A.245, accessed December 4, 2015,

<https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/statutes/?id=122A.245>.

8 2013 State Teacher Policy Yearbook: National Summary,” National Council on Teacher Quality (January 2014), p. 62, accessed December 4, 2015, http://www.nctq.org/dmsView/2013_State_Teacher_Policy_Yearbook_National_Summary_NCTQ_Report.

9 For example, one hiring officer stated, “Future teachers from other states are no longer coming to Mn. for licensure as in the past because of the difficulty of obtaining a license with all of the extra requirements beyond their own state licensing.” “Teacher Supply and Demand,” p. 105.

10 Minnesota Administrative Rules 8710.1400, accessed December 4, 2015, <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/rules/?id=8710.1400>.

11 Minnesota Administrative Rules 8710.1250, accessed December 4, 2015, <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/rules/?id=8710.1250>.

12 Minnesota Statutes 122A.25, accessed December 4, 2015, <https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/statutes/?id=122A.25>.

13 Teacher Supply and Demand,” pp. 53 & 58; see also, Beth Hawkins, “Are Minnesota’s teacher-prep programs leaving too many graduates unprepared?” MinnPost (April 3, 2014), accessed February 10, 2016, <https://www.minnpost.com/>

<learning-curve/2014/04/are-minnesotas-teacher-prep-programs-leaving-too-many-graduates-unprepared>.

14 Dan Goldhaber, “Everyone’s Doing It, But What Does Teacher Effectiveness?” University of Washington Working Paper (October 2006), accessed February 10, 2016, http://public.econ.duke.edu/~staff/wrkshop_papers/2006-07Papers/Goldhaber.pdf.

15 Teacher Supply and Demand,” p. 58.

16 2013 State Teacher Policy Yearbook: National Summary,” p. 106.

17 Edward P. Lazear, “Teacher Incentives,” Swedish Economic Policy Review 10 (2003): 179–214.

18 Cassandra M. Guarino, Lucrecia Santibanez, and Glenn A. Daley, “Teacher Recruitment and Retention: A Review of the Recent Empirical Literature,” Review of Educational Research 76 (2006): 173–208.

19 See, for example, the multi-state Talent Transfer Initiative funded by the U.S. Department of Education. Steven Glazerman, Ali Protik, Bing-ru Teh, Julie Bruch, and Jeffrey Max, “Transfer Incentives for High-Performing Teachers: Final Results from a Multisite Randomized Experiment,” U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences (2013), accessed

December 4, 2015, <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20144003/pdf/20144003.pdf>.

20 Julie Kowal, Bryan C. Hassel, and Emily Ayscue Hassel, “Financial Incentives for Hard-to-Staff Positions: Cross-Sector Lessons for Public Education,” Center for American Progress (2008), accessed December 4, 2015, <http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education/report/2008/11/20/5197/financial-incentives-for-hard-to-staff-positions/>.

21 2013 State Teacher Policy Yearbook: National Summary,” p. 62.

22 Charles T. Clotfelter, Helen F. Ladd, and Jacob L. Vigdor, “Teacher Mobility, School Segregation, and Pay-Based Policies to Level the Playing Field,” National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research (2010), pp. 5–7, accessed December 4, 2015, <http://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/alfresco/publication-pdfs/1001429-Teacher-Mobility-School-Segregation-and-Pay-Based-Policies-to-Level-the-Playing-Field.PDF>.

23 See “The Irreplaceables: Understanding the Real Retention Crisis in America’s Urban Schools,” TNTP (2012), accessed December 4, 2015, <http://tntp.org/irreplaceables>.

24 Teacher Supply and Demand,” p. 33.