

Executive Summary

State law requires a teacher to have a license to teach in a public school. The license must be aligned to the field or subject area and the grade level taught. The traditional teacher career pathway involved a candidate graduating from a bachelor’s or master’s degree program in education and passing licensure exams in pedagogy, skills, and content, but over time, other pathways to teacher licensure have developed. Some newer pathways include portfolios, “Grow Your Own” programs, and apprenticeship programs.

The state does not set salaries or benefits for teachers or other school employees. Rather, these are determined locally, either through collective bargaining in school districts and a few charter schools, or by the school board. For both school districts and charter schools, the state aid distributed on a per pupil basis through the general education revenue program funds the district or school’s operating expenses. These expenses include employee salaries, employee benefits, and supply costs, and each school board must adopt a budget each school year authorizing these expenses. For more information, see the House Research publication, *Teacher Compensation*, June 2024.

This publication provides context for legislators considering potential policies and programs to recruit more elementary and secondary school teachers into the field. It summarizes licensure requirements and programs established and funded by the legislature in recent years, and refers to sources of data that may be helpful in evaluating potential policies or programs.¹

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¹ Some policies or programs also affect early childhood education teachers, but policies or programs focusing on those teachers are outside the scope of this publication.

Teacher Licensing System

In 2017, the legislature enacted major changes to teacher licensure requirements, establishing a tiered licensure system with different requirements for each tier of license. Prior to that, a teacher who went through the traditional teacher pathway could obtain a five-year license, while unlicensed persons could obtain special permissions that allowed them to teach on a temporary basis.

The Professional Educator Licensing Standards and Board (PELSB) issues licenses to teachers that meet the requirements of the tiered licensure system under Minnesota Statutes, sections 122A.181 to 122A.184. These statutes establish four tiers of licensure: Tier 1, Tier 2, Tier 3, and Tier 4. PELSB commonly refers to Tier 3 and Tier 4 licenses as “professional licenses.” Eligibility for each tier varies, depending on the candidate’s education level, whether the candidate has passed required assessments, and the candidate’s teaching experience.

A Tier 3 or 4 license has significant advantages over a Tier 1 or 2 license. First, a Tier 1 license is valid for one year, a Tier 2 license for two years, a Tier 3 license for three years, and a Tier 4 license for four years. Second, Tier 1 and Tier 2 licenses have limited renewals, while Tier 3 and 4 licenses may be renewed indefinitely. Third, a teacher with a Tier 3 or 4 license may teach in any school district or charter school while a teacher with a Tier 1 or 2 license is limited to the district or charter school that submitted the license application with the teacher.

PELSB also establishes requirements for different fields.² A “field,” “licensure area,” or “subject area” means the content area a teacher may be licensed to teach. PELSB may grant a teacher an out-of-field permission to allow a teacher to teach outside of the teacher’s field or grade level for one academic school year.

Programs to Expand the Pool of Teacher Candidates

Most state funding directly addressing teacher workforce issues is for programs to help teacher candidates meet the requirements for a teacher license. Most of these programs are funded through the early education through grade 12 education budget, but some are funded through the higher education budget. Some programs provide financial support to candidates through scholarships or stipends, while others provide other types of supports, such as field placements or mentoring. Funding for programs that provide funding directly to the teacher candidate, in the form of scholarships or stipends, is addressed later in the publication.

² PELSB’s rules for field licenses are at Minnesota Rules, part 8710.3000 to 8710.5850.

Grants

Grow Your Own Grants

The legislature established Grow Your Own (GYO) grants³ for two types of school programs—one targeting adults affiliated with a school, and one targeting secondary school students. Both grants are administered by the commissioner of education.

Grants for Programs to Establish a Pathway to a Teacher License

This first type of GYO program is a grant to a district, charter school, Tribal contract school,⁴ or cooperative unit⁵ to establish a pathway for an adult to obtain a professional teaching license. A grantee must use at least 80 percent of grant funds to provide tuition scholarships or stipends to enable candidates to complete a teacher preparation program. The program is aimed at helping persons already affiliated with a district such as paraprofessionals or community members, who are of color or American Indian. Grant funds may also be used to pay for teacher licensure exams and licensure fees. The teacher preparation program may be structured to allow a candidate to continue to work for the district while fulfilling course requirements, and the district may require a participant to teach in the district for up to five years.

Grants for Programs for Secondary School Students

The second type of GYO program encourages secondary school students to pursue teaching careers. A district, charter school, Tribal contract school, or cooperative unit may use grant funds to:

- support future teacher clubs or service-learning opportunities for middle and high school students;
- develop and offer dual enrollment⁶ “Introduction to Teaching” or “Introduction to Education” courses that meet degree requirements for teacher licensure;
- provide direct support, including wrap-around services, to students who are of color or American Indian to enroll and succeed in dual enrollment courses that meet degree requirements for teacher licensure; or
- offer scholarships to graduating high school students who are of color or American Indian to enroll in PELSB-approved undergraduate teacher preparation programs at a college or university in Minnesota.

³ Minn. Stat. § 122A.73.

⁴ Tribal contract schools are schools funded by the federal Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), located on a reservation, and operated by a Tribe under a contract with the BIE.

⁵ Cooperative units are defined at section 123A.24, subdivision 2. Generally, they are joint powers entities formed by groups of school districts.

⁶ Dual enrollment programs allow students to earn secondary and postsecondary credit at the same time. See the House Research publication, *Dual Enrollment Programs for High School Students*, March 2025.

To be eligible for a grant, a district or charter school must ensure that the aggregate percentage of secondary school students of color and American Indian students participating in the program is equal to or greater than the aggregate percentage of students of color and American Indian students in the school district or charter school.

Collaborative Urban and Greater Minnesota Educators of Color (CUGMEC) Program

Institutions of higher education may apply for grants for board-approved teacher preparation programs to increase the number of teacher candidates who are of color or American Indian and meet the requirements of a Tier 3 license.⁷ PELSB administers this competitive grant process and awards the grants based on specific criteria set in statute, including the program's graduation rates and licensure recommendation rates for candidates who are of color or American Indian. Grantees have used funds for student scholarships and other direct financial support, and other program costs, including staff salaries and benefits, and professional development.

This program was originally known as the Collaborative Urban Educator (CUE) grant program when it was created in 1997. In 2017, the program was renamed the Collaborative Urban and Greater Minnesota Educator of Color (CUGMEC) program, and in 2019, the program was codified in statute. The criteria for awarding the grants have changed over time, evolving into the current competitive process.

Expanded Concurrent Enrollment Grants

The legislature established expanded concurrent enrollment grants to encourage students, especially American Indian students and students of color, to consider teaching as a profession.⁸ Schools and districts that partner with a postsecondary institution to offer "Introduction to Education" or "Introduction to Education" courses are eligible for the grants. Students who complete concurrent enrollment courses earn both high school and college credit. For more information about dual credit programs, see the House Research publication, *Dual Enrollment Programs for High School Students*, March 2025.

Grants to Prepare American Indian Teachers

Grants are awarded jointly to partnerships of school districts and postsecondary education institutions to assist American Indian people to become teachers and to provide additional education for American Indian teachers.⁹ Other partnerships may receive grants if funds are available. The partnerships named in statute are:

- the Duluth campus of the University of Minnesota and Independent School District No. 709, Duluth;

⁷ Minn. Stat. § 122A.635.

⁸ Minn. Stat. § 124D.09, subd. 10, para. (b).

⁹ Minn. Stat. § 122A.63.

- Bemidji State University and Independent School District No. 38, Red Lake;
- Minnesota State University, Moorhead and one of the school districts located within the White Earth Reservation; and
- Augsburg College, Independent School District No. 625, St. Paul, and Special School District No. 1, Minneapolis.

At least 80 percent of the grants awarded must be used for student scholarships, with priority given to students who are enrolled Tribal members, and then to first- and second-generation descendants. An eligible student may receive a scholarship to pursue a career in pre-kindergarten through grade 12 education, but the scholarships may also be awarded to students pursuing an educational goal in the following: any educational certification necessary for employment; early childhood family education or prekindergarten licensure; elementary and secondary education; school administration; or any educational program that provides services to American Indian students in prekindergarten through grade 12.

Pathway Preparation Grants

In 2023, the legislature appropriated funding for grants to support teachers holding a Tier 2 license and seeking a Tier 3 license through completion of a teacher preparation program or the licensure via portfolio process.¹⁰ The following entities are eligible for the grants: school districts, charter schools, service cooperatives, and partnerships between one or more teacher preparation providers, school districts, or charter schools. Grant recipients must provide teachers with professional development, mentorship, and appropriate coursework.

Black Men Teach Twin Cities

In 2021 and 2023, the legislature appropriated funding for a grant to Black Men Teach Twin Cities.¹¹ The organization must use the funds to establish partnerships with school district elementary schools or elementary charter schools with a goal of increasing the number of black male teachers to 20 percent of the teachers at each school site. The funds may be used for scholarships for aspiring teachers, student teacher stipends, mentoring activities, professional development, and stipends for housing to allow a teacher to live closer to the teacher's school.

Alternative Teacher Preparation Grant Program

A school district, charter school, or qualifying nonprofit organization may qualify for a grant for an alternative teacher preparation program or experimental teacher preparation program.¹² The program must certify that it is working to fill Minnesota's teacher shortage areas. Grant funds must be used to:

- establish approval by PELSB;
- expand an existing alternative teacher preparation program;

¹⁰ Laws 2023, ch. 55, art. 5, § 65, subd. 7.

¹¹ Laws 2021, 1st spec. sess., ch. 13, art. 3, sec. 7, subd. 2; Laws 2023, ch. 55, art. 5, § 64, subd. 4.

¹² Minn. Stat. § 136A.1276.

- recruit, select, and train teachers who reflect the racial or ethnic diversity of students in Minnesota; or
- implement professional development programs for teachers licensed through an alternative teacher preparation program.

The legislature last appropriated funding for alternative teacher preparation grants in 2017.

Coalition to Increase Teachers of Color and American Indian Teachers

In 2023, the legislature appropriated funds for a grant to the Coalition to Increase Teachers of Color and American Indian teachers in Minnesota for nonlobbying activities and general operating expenses that support the recruitment and retention of racially and ethnically diverse teachers underrepresented in the state’s workforce.¹³

Teacher Residency Program

In 2023, the legislature appropriated funding for a teacher residency program, defined in rule as programs offered in partnership with a designated school partner that provides a year-long clinical experience integrating learning opportunities and student teaching.¹⁴ Under the rule, a teacher residency program must:

- use a cohort-based model that pairs candidates (or “residents”) with cooperating teachers;
- ensure each candidate is placed for a full academic year to co-teach and participate in professional development for at least 80 percent of the contracted school week; and
- ensure that each cooperating teacher serves as the teacher of record and receives ongoing professional development in co-teaching, mentoring, and coaching skills.

The funding was available for teacher residency programs and registered teacher apprenticeships.

Support for Student Teachers

A candidate for a Tier 3 or Tier 4 license must complete 12 weeks of student teaching full-time while enrolled in a teacher preparation program. Teacher preparation programs match candidates with schools where the candidates can complete their student teaching. These placements are generally unpaid, but the legislature has established two grant programs to provide candidates stipends to complete their student teaching requirement, as well as a pilot program for candidates enrolled in specific teacher preparation programs.

¹³ Laws 2023, ch. 55, art. 5, § 64, subd. 6.

¹⁴ Laws 2023, ch. 55, art. 5, § 64, subd. 16.

Grant Programs

The Underrepresented Student Teacher grant program¹⁵ and the Student Teachers Grants in Shortage Areas program¹⁶ both provide student teachers a stipend of up to \$7,500. Both programs are administered by the Office of Higher Education, and require applicants to:

- be enrolled in a PELSB-approved teacher preparation program that requires at least 12 weeks of student teaching;
- demonstrate financial need; and
- meet satisfactory academic progress.

The difference between the two is that the Underrepresented Student Teacher grant program requires applicants to belong to a racial or ethnic group underrepresented in the Minnesota teacher workforce, while the Student Teachers Grants in Shortage Areas program requires applicants to intend to teach in a rural school district or to teach in a license shortage area.¹⁷

Pilot Program

In 2024, the legislature established a pilot program to support student teachers placed in Minnesota school districts or charter schools to complete clinical experiences necessary to obtain Minnesota teaching licenses, and help policymakers determine how to reduce the financial burden of completing valuable clinical experiences and strengthen the pipeline of qualified teachers.¹⁸ The pilot program is effective for the 2024-2025 school year.

The pilot program is limited to eight specified teacher preparation program providers: St. Cloud State University; Bemidji State University; Minnesota State University, Mankato; Winona State University; Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College; the University of Minnesota-Duluth; the University of Minnesota-Crookston; and Augsburg University. Each provider received a specified amount of funding, which the provider must use to award each student teacher a stipend. The stipend for each student must be the same, regardless of the student teacher's financial need or intended licensure area.

Only student teachers placed in a Minnesota school district or charter school to complete required student teaching are eligible for the stipend. A student teacher may receive a stipend under the pilot program, in addition to a grant from the underrepresented student teacher or student teacher in license shortage area program.

¹⁵ Minn. Stat. § 136A.1274.

¹⁶ Minn. Stat. § 136A.1275.

¹⁷ A "license shortage area" means: English as a second language; early childhood; special education; career and technical education; science, technology, engineering, arts, and math; and world languages. A "rural school district" means a school district with fewer than 30 resident pupils per square mile.

¹⁸ Laws 2024, ch. 115, art. 5, § 20.

Hiring Bonuses

In 2021 and 2023, the legislature appropriated funding to reimburse districts and schools for hiring bonuses.¹⁹ A district that seeks reimbursement through the program must verify that the bonus is given to teachers from another state or country who immediately qualify for a Tier 2 or higher Minnesota license; have moved to Minnesota; and belong to a racial or ethnic group that is underrepresented among teachers compared to students in the district or school. The amount of the bonus ranges from \$4,000 to \$10,000, with teachers with field licenses in shortage areas eligible for higher bonuses. The teacher must have a Tier 3 or Tier 4 license to qualify for the second half of the bonus.

Teacher Recruitment Marketing Campaign

In 2021 and 2023, PELSB received funding to enter into contracts for outreach and marketing campaigns to elevate the profession and recruit teachers, especially teachers of color and American Indian teachers.²⁰ The contracts were required to be awarded through a request for proposal process, and be awarded to firms or organizations that demonstrated capacity to reach wide and varied audiences of prospective teachers. The legislature required the campaigns to focus on increasing interest in teaching in the following populations: high school and college students of color or American Indian students who have not chosen a career path; or adults from racial or ethnic groups underrepresented in the teacher workforce who may be seeking to change careers.

Programs to Support Teachers in Specific Fields

Special Education

School districts consistently report having trouble filling special education teaching positions. According to PELSB's 2023 supply and demand report, special education is one of the licensure areas with the highest proportion of teachers holding a Tier 1 license, Tier 2 license, or out-of-field permission for their assignment.

In 2024, the legislature responded to concerns from the U.S. Department of Education that Minnesota law did not comply with federal law because it allowed teachers pursuing an alternate route to special education certification to assume functions as a teacher for more than three years. The legislature amended section 122A.181 to limit the time a teacher with a Tier 1 license in a special education field can work as a teacher to no more than three years. It also required a district or charter school hiring a Tier 1 special education teacher to affirm that the teacher will receive high-quality professional development and will participate in a program of intensive supervision that consists of structured guidance and regular ongoing support for teachers or a teacher mentoring program. An applicant for a Tier 1 license in special education

¹⁹ Minn. Stat. § 122A.59.

²⁰ Laws 2023, ch. 55, art. 5, § 65, subd. 10.

must also demonstrate satisfactory progress toward professional licensure. In addition, the legislature amended the requirements for a Tier 2 special education teacher.

Special Education Teacher Pipeline

In 2023, the legislature established the Special Education Teacher Pipeline Program to develop a pipeline of trained, licensed Tier 3 or Tier 4 special education teachers.²¹ The program provides grants to school districts, charter schools, Tribal contract schools, and cooperative units to support persons already working for the grant recipient who wish to become special education teachers. A grant recipient must partner with an eligible teacher preparation program or institution with a transfer pathway with a teacher preparation program. Grant funds may be used to provide participants with tuition assistance or stipends or other supports, or to recruit participants.

The commissioner of education administers this program and must prioritize funding for training to allow participants with a Tier 1 or Tier 2 special education license to obtain a Tier 3 special education license. If there are enough applications, the commissioner must also, to the extent practicable, award an equal number of grants between applicants in greater Minnesota and applicants in the metropolitan area.

Special Education Apprenticeship Programs

In 2023, the legislature appropriated funding for grants to four intermediate school districts for special education registered apprenticeship programs.^{22,23} Grant funds may be used for program oversight and administrative costs; stipends and tuition, fees, and other direct program costs incurred by grantees; stipends for teachers serving as mentors; and the cost of substitute teachers.

Heritage Language and Culture Teachers

In 2023, the legislature established a heritage language and culture teacher licensure pathway program to increase the number of heritage language and culture teachers in Minnesota.²⁴ Participating teachers take part in a yearlong mentorship program, create a portfolio, attend monthly meetings, and receive a stipend to cover substitute teachers when meetings take place

²¹ Minn. Stat. § 122A.77.

²² Laws 2024, ch. 115, art. 5, § 23, subd. 2.

²³ A registered apprenticeship program is career pathway that meets specific federal requirements and is approved by the U.S. Department of Labor. These programs are generally a partnership between employers, workforce development boards and apprenticeship offices, instruction providers, collective bargaining units, and other groups. They include structured on-the-job training, supplemental education, and progressive wages as apprentices' skills and productivity increase. They also allow apprentices to earn an industry credential. Apprenticeship programs are often used in the construction and related industries, but in recent years, some states have developed teacher apprenticeship programs, including programs that build on existing Grow Your Own or teaching residency programs. See U.S. Department of Education, "Dear Colleague Letter," August 31, 2022.

²⁴ Minn. Stat. § 122A.631.

during school days. Funding for the program includes a portfolio liaison, substitute teachers on meeting days, and fees associated with obtaining a license.

Agricultural Educator Grants

The agricultural educator grant program provides funding for school districts to pay for an agricultural education teacher's salary and benefits for work over the summer with high school students in extended programs.²⁵ A grantee must provide a one-to-one dollar match.

Direct Financial Support for Teachers and Teacher Candidates

This section describes programs specifically targeting teachers and teacher candidates. In contrast to the programs in the previous section, these financial incentives are provided directly to the candidate, rather than the teacher preparation program the student is enrolled in.

Tax Credits

A teacher who completes a master's degree program can claim a nonrefundable tax credit of up to \$2,500.²⁶ The master's degree must be in a core content area in which the teacher provides direct classroom instruction; qualifying areas are reading, English or language arts, math, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, arts, history, or geography. A master's degree with a pedagogy component does not qualify as a master's in a core content area.

Teacher Shortage Loan Repayment

An eligible teacher may qualify for loan repayment of qualified educational loans up to \$1,000 per year for up to five years.²⁷ The commissioner of higher education must make annual disbursements directly to the participants. To be eligible, a teacher must belong to a racial or ethnic group underrepresented in the Minnesota teacher workforce. To the extent funds are available, teachers in rural school districts or in a license shortage area are also eligible.²⁸

²⁵ Laws 2017, 1st spec. sess. ch. 5, art. 2, § 51.

²⁶ Minn. Stat. § 290.0686.

²⁷ Minn. Stat. § 136A.1791.

²⁸ A "racial or ethnic group underrepresented in the teacher workforce" means a racial or ethnic group for which the aggregate percentage of Minnesota teachers of that racial or ethnic group is lower than the aggregate percentage of Minnesota kindergarten through grade 12 students of that racial or ethnic group. A "rural school district" means a school district with fewer than 30 resident pupil units per square mile. A "license shortage area" means the license areas listed under section 136A.1275 (Student Teachers Grants in Shortage Areas).

Aspiring Teachers of Color Scholarship Pilot Program

Undergraduate and graduate students preparing to become teachers may apply for a scholarship of up to \$10,000 per year, for up to \$25,000 total.²⁹ Applicants must be enrolled in a teacher preparation program approved by PELSB and be seeking their first teaching license, or be enrolled a postsecondary institution eligible for state student aid and completing a two-year program for early childhood educators; affirm to the teacher preparation program or the Office of Higher Education that the applicant is a person of color or American Indian; be meeting satisfactory academic progress; and demonstrate financial need.

Reimbursements for Teacher Licensing and Exam Fees

In 2023, the legislature appropriated funds to reduce financial burdens on aspiring teachers by covering the costs associated with teacher licensing exams and first professional teacher license fees for newly graduated teachers.³⁰

²⁹ Laws 2021, 1st spec. sess., ch. 2, art. 2, § 45.

³⁰ Laws 2023, ch. 55, art. 5, § 64, subd. 11.

Appendix: Teacher Workforce Data

PELSB maintains the Staff Automated Reporting (STAR) System, which contains licensure and employment data that PELSB receives from school districts and charter schools, including data on licensed teachers and nonlicensed staff and their assignments.³¹

PELSB is required to publish two reports related to the teacher workforce. The first is titled “Supply & Demand of Teachers in Minnesota,” which draws on STAR data, as well as surveys, and other data collected by PELSB. The report must include data regarding retirement patterns, teacher licensure, teacher diversity, the teacher shortage and substitute teacher shortage, survey data from school districts and teacher preparation programs, and whether districts are making progress in hiring teachers and substitute teachers in the areas of shortage.³²

The second report is a summary of state programs that receive state funding aimed at increasing the racial and ethnic diversity of the state’s teacher workforce to more closely reflect the diversity of students. The reporting requirement was enacted in 2023 as a part of a statute establishing a goal of increasing the percentage of teachers of color and American Indian teachers in Minnesota. The first report is due by November 3, 2025, and subsequent reports will be due by November 3 each even-numbered year. The report must include policy and funding recommendations to meet the state goal.

In addition, all states report data on the number of individuals enrolled in teacher preparation programs to the U.S. Department of Education. This data includes the number of candidates, disaggregated by gender and race or ethnicity, program admission and completion requirements, and pass rates on assessments required for a teaching credential. State reports are available from the U.S. Department of Education at <https://title2.ed.gov/Public/Home.aspx>.



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³¹ Information on the STAR report is available at <https://mn.gov/pelsb/districts/data-submissions/star/>.

³² In 2024, the legislature modified the deadline for these reports, and the list of data that must be included in the report. The next report is due by November 1, 2025, and subsequent reports are due by November 1 of each even-numbered year.