

OPINION EXCHANGE

Counterpoint: Licensing loophole undermines teacher quality

Proposed legislation would close this loophole and raise the bar for our educators.

By Caroline Maguire and Laura Mogelson | MAY 6, 2021 – 5:30PM

In 2017 Minnesota adopted a tiered licensure system for teachers, creating temporary "Tier 1" and "Tier 2" licenses that allow individuals interested in teaching to fill vacant positions when necessary. Unfortunately, the legislation that established the tiered system created a loophole that allows individuals to move from a temporary license to a permanent license without meeting the state's teacher licensure requirements. The current House education omnibus bill limits the situations in which this loophole can be used.

On May 4, in "[Don't expel talented teachers,](https://www.startribune.com/journey-toward-equity-must-begin-at-school/600053170/)" (https://www.startribune.com/journey-toward-equity-must-begin-at-school/600053170/) Paula Cole argued against this legislation. We support the legislation because we believe allowing this loophole to remain would lower the bar for teacher quality in Minnesota.

The Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (PELSB) has articulated minimum requirements that teachers must meet to earn a full teaching license. Teacher preparation programs organize their curriculum around these standards. PELSB also offers a "licensure via portfolio" option that allows teachers to bypass a licensure program by submitting a portfolio that demonstrates that they have met the standards. The previous commentary's assertion that removing the loophole would force all teachers to "complete a teacher preparation program" is inaccurate, as Cole neglected to mention the licensure via portfolio option. She also incorrectly stated that licensure programs include "unpaid teacher residency requirements" which present a barrier for these teachers. While it is true that PELSB requires a student teaching period in which teacher candidates are supervised, there is no requirement that this is unpaid. And PELSB has outlined processes for individuals to complete this while teaching in their own classroom.

Cole describes the requirements for moving from a temporary license to a full professional license as teaching experience, "high performance" and "evidence of effectiveness." But no "high performance" is required. Instead, a teacher may move from a temporary to a permanent license if the individual has not been placed on an improvement plan. Not being placed on an improvement plan is not the same as high performance, and it does not ensure "effectiveness." It is a very low bar.

We believe the omnibus bill does not go far enough to close the licensure loophole. Although Cole describes the bill as completely removing the pathway for a Tier 2 teacher to earn a license after three years of teaching, the legislation in fact merely limits its use to certain economic development regions in the state and licensure shortage areas.

Over the past decade, teacher educators in Minnesota have worked hard to create many paths to teacher licensure. Traditional higher education programs still exist, but many nonconventional and alternative teacher preparation programs have been established, and the licensure via portfolio option has been expanded. In each of these options, candidates are required to provide evidence that they have mastered Minnesota's teacher standards as well as statutory requirements for teaching reading, meeting the needs of English learners and teaching students with dyslexia. Teachers licensed via this loophole have not gone through any kind of process demonstrating evidence that they meet these requirements.

Many, like Cole, argue that this loophole must remain because so many teachers are leaving the profession. However, multiple studies have shown that a lack of adequate preparation is a significant risk factor in teacher attrition. There is much that should be



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There is much that should be done to remove barriers to teaching, Caroline Maguire and Laura Mogelson say, but allowing some

done to remove barriers into the teaching profession, and we fully support nontraditional pathways to licensure. However, allowing some teachers to bypass state requirements should not be the solution.

Caroline Maguire is president, Minnesota Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, and continuous improvement coordinator in the Office of Teacher Education, University of Minnesota. Laura Mogelson is director, Multiple Pathways to Teaching in the College of Education and Human Development, University of Minnesota.