

Subject Changes to Office of Higher Education programs for teachers from racial or ethnic groups that are underrepresented in the teacher workforce

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Date March 12, 2020

Overview

The bill makes changes to the student teacher grant program and teacher shortage loan forgiveness program. It also requires that a portion of the fiscal year 2021 appropriation for the grant program be spent on teachers who belong to racial or ethnic groups that are underrepresented in teaching.

The most significant changes to the student teacher grant program are:

- Modifying the definition of “shortage areas.”
- Establishing a reserve account for unspent appropriations to the program for racial and ethnic groups underrepresented in teaching.
- Preventing the commissioner from using unspent funds that were appropriated for underrepresented teachers on teachers in shortage areas. Unspent funds are transferred to the reserve account.
- Adding rules for prioritizing grant recipients if appropriations are insufficient.

The most significant changes to the loan forgiveness program are:

- Opening the program to teachers from underrepresented racial or ethnic groups.
- Doubling the maximum award.
- Modifying the definition of “shortage areas.”
- Modifying rules for prioritizing grant recipients.

- Requiring an equitable distribution of funds across the state’s economic development regions.

Summary

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1	Student teacher grants.
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Makes numerous changes to the existing student teacher candidate grants program.

Subd. 1. Establishment. Changes the population served from the program. Under current law the program serves two groups:

- Students who intend to teach in a geographic area designated as a teacher shortage area.
- Students who belong to a racial or ethnic group that is underrepresented in the teacher workforce.

The bill modifies the treatment of teachers in shortage areas. The bill changes the program so that it would serve students who are student teaching in a licensure shortage area, which is defined as a licensure field within an economic development region experiencing a shortage of Tier 3 or Tier 4 licensed teachers.

Subd. 1a. Definitions. Defines the following terms:

- “Economic development region” is a region designated in a 1983 executive order.
- “Licensure shortage area” is a licensure field within an economic development region experiencing a shortage of Tier 3 or Tier 4 licensed teachers, as determined by the Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board in its teacher supply and demand report. The severity of a shortage is determined by the percentage of teachers working who do not hold a Tier 3 or Tier 4 license.
- “Permanent residence” means the address a student listed on the student’s most recent Fee Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or the economic development region in which the student teacher graduated from high school.
- “Racial or ethnic group that is underrepresented in the teacher workforce” means a racial or ethnic group for which the aggregate

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percentage of Minnesota teachers is lower than the aggregate percentage of Minnesota K-12 students of the group.

Subd. 2. Eligibility. Changes eligibility requirements for student teachers in shortage areas. To qualify, a student must be student teaching in one of the ten most severe licensure shortage areas in the economic development region where the candidate's student teaching site or permanent residence is located. Under current law, a candidate needs only to intend to teach in a shortage area.

Subd. 3. Administration. Requires the commissioner to notify grant recipients by August 1 for fall student teaching placements, December 1 for spring placements, and May 1 for summer placements. These deadlines do not apply for grants awarded to student teachers who apply after the application deadlines.

Removes language allowing funds reserved for underrepresented teachers to be awarded to teacher candidates in shortage areas, if there is a lack of qualifying candidates that are from underrepresented racial or ethnic groups. Requires unspent funds reserved for teachers from underrepresented groups to be transferred to a reserve account.

Requires OHE to consider all applicants regardless of the order in which the application was received before the deadline. If insufficient funds are available, OHE must give priority to applicants teaching in the most severe licensure shortage areas in their economic development regions.

Subd. 4. Creation of account. Establishes a reserve account for funding to provide grants to teachers belonging to an underrepresented racial or ethnic group. Provides that unspent appropriations do not cancel.

Subd. 5. Reporting. Requires OHE to submit an annual report to the legislature. The report must include the balance of the reserve account, the shortage areas qualifying for awards, the extent of racial or ethnic underrepresentation in the teacher workforce, and details on applicants and awards.

Additionally requires OHE to provide the legislature with award data within 60 days of award notifications in subdivision 3.

2 Teacher shortage loan forgiveness program.

Subd. 1. Definitions. Expands the definition of "teacher" to include Head Start or Early Head Start nonlicensed professionals.

Defines the following terms:

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- “Economic development region” is a region designated in a 1983 executive order.
- “Racial or ethnic group that is underrepresented in the teacher workforce” and licensure shortage area have the meanings given in section 1 of the bill.

Subd. 2. Program established; administration. Requires OHE to consider all applicants for the program regardless of the order in which the application was received before the deadline. If insufficient funds are available, OHE must give priority to applicants with the greatest financial need and applicants teaching in the most severe licensure shortage areas.

Requires OHE to ensure an equitable distribution of loan repayment funds to teachers across all economic development regions.

Requires OHE to allocate funds for teachers from underrepresented racial or ethnic groups separately.

Requires OHE to reserve a percentage of total program funds for teachers belonging to an underrepresented racial or ethnic group. The percentage of funds must be equal to or greater than the percentage of K-12 students belonging to racial or ethnic groups that are underrepresented in the teacher workforce.

Subd. 3. Use of report on teacher shortage areas. Removes old language defining shortage areas.

Subd. 4. Application for loan forgiveness; eligibility. Limits eligibility for the program to teachers who have taught in Minnesota for a complete school year, and meet one of the following two criteria:

- Have taught in one of the ten most severe licensure shortage areas in the teacher’s economic development region.
- Belong to a racial or ethnic group underrepresented in the teacher workforce.

Subd. 5. Award amount. Increases the maximum award to \$2,000.

Increases the maximum number of awards a teacher may receive from five to ten.

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Permits applicants who are both teaching in licensure shortage areas and belong to underrepresented racial and ethnic groups to receive loan forgiveness of up to \$3,000 or the cumulative balance of the applicant's loans.

Subd. 9. Annual reporting. Requires OHE to submit an annual legislative report that includes:

- The balance of the teacher shortage reserve account.
- The amount of funds allocated among the state's economic development regions.
- The number of applicants and recipients and the basis for their eligibility.
- The total amount of education loans reported, the average amount of education loan debt, and the range in the amounts of debt provided.

3 Grants to Teacher Candidates.

The 2019 omnibus higher education bill dedicated \$750,000 of the annual teacher candidate grant appropriation to candidates from underrepresented racial or ethnic groups. The bill requires that the \$750,000 dedication in fiscal year 2021 is in addition to the amount that is statutorily dedicated to candidates from underrepresented groups.

The bill additionally prohibits unspent amounts dedicated to teachers from underrepresented groups from being spent on teacher candidates in shortage areas, and instead transfers unspent amounts to the reserve account.

The bill increases the portion of the appropriation that OHE may use for administration from three percent to five percent.

4 Repealer.

Repeals rules governing the teacher shortage loan forgiveness program limiting the award amount to the balance of the applicant's loans, and describing how OHE must prioritize awards if insufficient funds are available. These issues are addressed in section 2, subdivisions 2 and 5.



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