

OVERVIEW:

ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS TO TEACHER LICENSURE IN THE MINNESOTA STATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES SYSTEM

The term “alternative pathways” is used in many ways. All definitions refer to alternatives to the “traditional” four-year baccalaureate program or “fifth year” post-baccalaureate program designed for individuals who are simultaneously earning a degree and initial licensure. The breadth and design of alternative programs can vary greatly.

For the purposes of this report, the term “alternative pathways” is used broadly to refer to any pathway designed to help an individual achieve licensure through something other than the traditional baccalaureate programs historically available from the state universities. As the descriptions make clear, they generally follow one of the following models:

- expedited programs that allow individuals to complete licensure standards through a package of evening, week-end, and/or summer courses that enable an individual to pursue licensure while employed full-time in a field other than teaching;
- programs delivered entirely online or via blended learning options that combine face-to-face and distance learning sessions, thus allowing an individual to access courses from virtually any location in the state;
- programs that provide preparation for individuals to complete preparation and earn initial licensure while they are teaching in a Minnesota classroom;
- highly individualized programs shaped after a careful assessment of the prospective teacher’s education and experiences; and
- two-plus-two programs that build pathways from two-year colleges, where students complete the first two years of a licensure programs, to four-year institutions where students complete a baccalaureate degree and licensure requirements.

CURRENT P-12 ALTERNATIVE PATHWAY LICENSURE PROGRAMS AVAILABLE

Bemidji State University

- Bemidji State assesses the background and credentials of individuals seeking teacher licensure and then makes program modifications tailored to meet individuals’ needs. The university currently offers online options for teachers to add licenses and to enroll in content courses that fill gaps in preparation for mid-career professionals who wish to teach.
- All K-8 licensure courses, along with courses for communication arts and literature and social studies specialties, are available online through the Distributed Learning in Teacher Education (DLiTE) program. In addition, some students access math, science, and preprimary specialties by coupling “in-person” classes in those areas with other online DLiTE courses. Field experiences are a major part of the DLiTE program, with assigned teacher mentors provided in local school districts throughout the state. The program admits cohorts with specialized needs and focuses, such as one that is designed to address the needs of Native American students.

- A “Fastrack” program provides all Standards of Effective Practice courses online, with modified student teaching, for those already holding a BA/BS degree in a licensable field. Students in this program take courses and complete student teaching with BSU, then include their transcript in a portfolio submitted to the Minnesota Department of Education for licensure. With this program, BSU is not the party recommending licensure but is simply the course provider. The Fastrack program is designed to be completed in two summers with one intervening year while students are still in the workplace.
- BSU also offers three accelerated licensure programs that have been designed to meet current Board of Teaching rules, respond to the Governor’s interest in accelerated teacher preparation and provide mentoring for new teachers. These programs, available only to individuals who have completed a BA or BS degree in a licensable area, include:
 - a 15-month online/blended/summer accelerated licensure program (5-12) in mathematics and science;
 - an online/blended/summer accelerated model for 5-12 licensure plus a master’s degree (Master of Education); and
 - a 15-month blended and accelerated licensure program in special education (Learning Disabilities/Emotional-Behavioral Disorders) licensure.

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Metropolitan State University

- The Urban Teacher Program is a collaboration among Metropolitan State University, Minneapolis Community and Technical College and Inver Hills Community College. This program provides professional education licensure opportunities leading to middle school and secondary school licensure in Communicative Arts and Literature, Social Studies, Mathematics and Life Science. A recently approved early childhood education program is available for birth – grade 3 licensure. The program provides assessments of prior learning to meet program and Board of Teaching standards for candidates who have previous educational and/or experiential backgrounds and are seeking licensure. Currently, program managers are exploring ways to collaborate with the St. Paul and Minneapolis public schools to seek ways for educational paraprofessionals to meet the No Child Left Behind requirements and obtain teaching licenses.

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Minnesota State University, Mankato

- The Rapid Response Program is designed to meet the needs of working professionals ready to move into a teaching career. The 12- to 18-month program attracts new teachers to areas of need including science, teaching English as a second language, world languages, and mathematics. Program length depends on candidates’ content knowledge and is based on previous coursework and experience. Program coursework is offered on weekends and supplemented with online instruction. Candidates complete education coursework as a cohort, benefiting from a support network.
- An entirely online graduate licensing program in special education helps teachers (those currently teaching on variances) complete full licensure standards while still teaching in

special education classrooms. A large number of special education teachers in Minnesota are currently teaching on variances, especially in the area of Emotional/Behavioral Disorders. Currently finishing the first year of its third cohort, the program has plans to admit a new cohort for summer 2005 and to expand recruitment next year in order to realize larger enrollments beginning summer 2006. Recruitment focuses on special education teachers currently on variances in areas, especially rural and remote regions where they cannot access higher education programs. The program requires a letter of support from the school administrator. Students in the cohorts are located all around the state of Minnesota.

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Minnesota State University Moorhead

- This program offers back-to-school, seamless transition services for non-traditional/returning students who would like to pursue initial licensure after a career in a non-teaching field. One-on-one assessments with candidates review transcripts and previous experiences. Waivers or substitution of required classes/field experiences (based upon documented competencies, or evidence of mastery of Standards of Effective Practice using portfolios, evaluation forms, letters of recommendation, videotapes, and reflective writings) are considered. Significant portions of programs can be waived based on documented experience and the program can be completed in less than one year. Services for non-traditional students include an office within Continuing Studies Division which grants students credit for prior learning; opportunities to test-out of selected courses and a growing variety of online, hybrid, evening and Saturday offerings. Specifically, Educational Foundations courses are being developed as an online core for returning students and the science and math departments are actively recruiting students to return for coursework with web-based and hybrid courses.

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St. Cloud State University

- St. Cloud State offers a broad array of programs and numerous pathways that students may follow to obtain teacher licensure in any of 34 different licensure areas. Individual assessments of each student's background are done. Transcripts, previous experiences, documented competencies, portfolios relating to Standards of Effective Practice, and student writing samples may be reviewed. Each student develops a plan of study. Courses, experiences and length of study will depend upon the outcome of a review of the candidate's background. Available alternative pathways vary by licensure area.
- For the past five years, a collaborative Teacher Preparation Project has offered teacher licensure preparation opportunities for teaching assistants as well as for individuals who hold non-teaching bachelor's degrees. The project involves North Branch Area Schools, the Cambridge campus of Anoka-Ramsey Community College and St. Cloud State University
- A 15-month Transition to Teaching project with the St. Cloud Area School District just ended. This program prepared professionals who wanted to become teachers in secondary science,

mathematics and special education, particularly for students with emotional-behavioral disorders.

- New program offerings specifically geared to individuals holding non-teaching bachelor's degrees are available in information media, teaching English as a second language, school counseling and special education. At any time, about 100 candidates with degrees in non-teaching fields enroll in one of four special education graduate certification programs which lead to initial licensure.

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Southwest Minnesota State University

Southwest Minnesota State University provides online, evening and summer classes for non-traditional or returning students who would like to pursue licensure. Student teaching experiences are adapted to meet individual student needs. Assessments for individuals with a bachelor's degree seeking initial licensure and for individuals adding a licensure area are provided on a case-by-case basis. This includes a review of prior education and experiences related to the Minnesota Standards of Effective Practice. An individualized plan is developed for teachers so that individuals may meet licensure goals as quickly as possible. Evidence may include course achievements, portfolios, letters of recommendation, videotapes, reflective writings, and classroom observations.

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