

S.F. No. 1984 – Modifying the Teacher Candidate Grant Program and the Teacher Shortage Loan Forgiveness Program

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Senate File No. 1984 amends the Teacher Candidate Grants program, renamed the Student Teacher Grants program, and the Teacher Shortage Loan Forgiveness program, renamed the Teacher Shortage Loan Repayment program, by redefining terms to clarify the parameters of the programs and target funds to teachers who work in districts and licensure fields that have the most need, and to teachers who belong to racial or ethnic groups underrepresented in the teacher workforce.

Section 1 (136A.1275) amends the student teacher grants. Under current law, a teacher must intend to teach in a “shortage area” or belong to an underrepresented racial or ethnic group to be eligible for the program. The revised program makes eligible a student teacher who intends to teach in a rural school district, intends to work in a license shortage area, or, as in existing law, belongs to a racial or ethnical group underrepresented in the workforce.

Under subdivision 1, the following terms are defined:

“license shortage area,” which includes the following license fields: special education, English as a second language, physics, chemistry, mathematics, and middle level science. (This list is based on chronic shortages in these fields over the past decade.)

“racial or ethnic group underrepresented in the teacher workforce,” which means a group for which the aggregate percentage of Minnesota teachers of that racial or ethnic group is lower than the aggregate percentage of K-12 students of that racial or ethnic group, and

“rural school district,” which means a school district with fewer than ten resident pupil units per square mile. (This includes 227 school districts, out of a total 331 school districts in the state.)

Subdivision 2 provides the eligibility for the program; the term “intending to teach in a shortage area” is stricken and replaced with new eligibility criteria, which includes that the teacher must intend to teach in a rural school district or intend to teach in a license shortage

area, in addition to existing criteria, which includes belonging to a racial or ethnic group underrepresented in the workforce, being enrolled in a teacher preparation program, demonstrating financial need, and making satisfactory progress in school.

Subdivision 3 adds language specifying a priority list if there are insufficient funds.

Subdivision 4 adds a new annual report requirement, due by February 1, which must contain information on the number of individuals who received grants, the race or ethnicity of the teachers participating in the program, the licensure areas and school districts in which the teachers taught, the amount paid to student teachers, and other summary data identified by the commissioner as outcome indicators.

Section 2 (136A.1791) amends the Teacher Shortage Loan Repayment program.

Subdivision 1 limits the annual disbursement to qualified educational loans for a teacher's initial preparation. Current law allows repayment for loans for education beyond initial preparation. The definition of "teacher shortage area" is stricken, and the new terms "license shortage area," "racial or ethnic group underrepresented in the teacher workforce," and "rural school district" are defined, consistent with the new definitions in section 1.

Subdivisions 2 and 3 strike obsolete language based on the modifications to the program.

Subdivision 3a provides the new eligibility criteria. To be eligible for a disbursement under this section, a student teacher must belong to a racial or ethnic group underrepresented in the Minnesota teacher workforce, teach in a rural school district, or teach in a license shortage area.

Subdivisions 4 to 9 contain conforming amendments.