
Summary

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

Key Facts and Findings:

- The Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (PELSB) must award Collaborative Urban and Greater Minnesota Educators of Color (CUGMEC) grants to increase the number of teacher candidates of color and American Indian teacher candidates who meet certain teacher licensing requirements. (p. 3)
- The Legislature has made a number of changes to the grant program in recent years. (p. 4)
- Statutes limit eligibility for CUGMEC grants to institutions of higher education with PELSB-approved teacher preparation programs. For Fiscal Year 2021, PELSB awarded a total of \$970,000 in CUGMEC funding to eight higher education institutions. (pp. 4, 8)
- Based on our analysis, the majority of CUGMEC beneficiaries who graduated in fiscal years 2016 through 2019 became employed as Minnesota public school teachers. (p. 28)
- A lack of reliable data on Minnesota teacher candidates and public school teachers' race and ethnicity makes it difficult to accurately determine the racial and ethnic composition of the teacher workforce. (p. 34)
- Nevertheless, our analysis indicated there has been a slight increase in recent years in the percentage of Minnesota teachers who are people of color or American Indian. (p. 36)
- PELSB's grant award process met most requirements and was generally transparent, but some aspects of the process lacked clarity. (p. 41)
- The Legislature has not defined a clear focus for the CUGMEC grant program. (p. 61)
- In the absence of legislative direction, PELSB has prioritized CUGMEC funding for direct financial assistance to teacher candidates. (p. 62)

Key Recommendations:

- PELSB should standardize and improve the processes and systems used to collect data on teacher candidates and licensed teachers' race and ethnicity. (p. 35)
- PELSB should ensure that the CUGMEC grant application and scoring rubric incorporate all information needed to meet requirements for awarding grants. (p. 56)
- The Legislature should: (1) clearly define the focus of the CUGMEC grant program, (2) outline how grant funding may be used and establish corresponding outcome measures, and (3) review requirements for awarding grant funds. (p. 66)
- As the Legislature makes decisions related to CUGMEC, it should determine how CUGMEC fits into Minnesota's efforts to increase the number of teachers of color and American Indian teachers in Minnesota. (p. 71)

While PELSB has generally managed the CUGMEC grant program well, it is difficult to measure the program's impact.

Report Summary

Minnesota has some of the nation's largest education achievement gaps based on student race and ethnicity. And, Minnesota's teacher workforce is significantly less racially and ethnically diverse than its student population. This disparity matters because research suggests that teachers of color can help improve academic outcomes for students of color.

The Collaborative Urban and Greater Minnesota Educators of Color (CUGMEC) program provides grants to higher education institutions to increase the number of teacher candidates of color and American Indian teacher candidates who meet certain teacher licensing requirements.¹ Statutes require the Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (PELSB) to administer the CUGMEC grant program.

For Fiscal Year 2021, PELSB awarded a total of \$970,000 in CUGMEC funding to eight higher education institutions.

The Legislature has made a number of changes to the CUGMEC grant program in recent years.

First created as the Collaborative Urban Educator grant program in 1997, the Legislature changed the program's name in 2017.²

The 2019 Legislature codified the CUGMEC grant program for the first time; this was also the first year the Legislature explicitly stated that grants must be awarded to increase the number of teacher candidates of color and American Indian candidates.³

The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) administered the CUGMEC grant program for most of its existence. In 2019, the Legislature moved administration of the

program from MDE to PELSB starting with Fiscal Year 2020 grants.

The Legislature also recently changed how CUGMEC grants are awarded. Until Fiscal Year 2018, a small group of institutions, named most years in law, received CUGMEC funding. For fiscal years 2018 and 2019, the Legislature named certain grantee institutions in law, but it also mandated that MDE award a portion of the funding on a competitive basis. Starting in Fiscal Year 2020, the Legislature required that all grants be awarded through a competitive process.

It is too early to know what impact these and other changes to the CUGMEC grant program will have overall. In fact, it is difficult to measure the impact of the CUGMEC grant program at all. Grantee institutions with whom we spoke supported CUGMEC beneficiaries with funding from other sources as well as CUGMEC. For this and other reasons, we cannot attribute outcomes for CUGMEC beneficiaries solely to that program. But, CUGMEC may have contributed to a variety of outcomes.

While CUGMEC supported hundreds of teacher candidates in fiscal years 2016 through 2020, not all of them became Minnesota public school teachers.

We reviewed data provided by grantee institutions to determine the extent to which the 590 teacher candidates who directly benefitted from CUGMEC funding in fiscal years 2016 through 2020 were still participating in, graduated from, or withdrew from their teacher preparation programs.⁴ Grantee institutions reported that 230 of those 590 CUGMEC beneficiaries (39 percent) graduated by July 2020. Another 272 beneficiaries (46 percent) were enrolled in 2020, which may indicate that they were still working towards their degree. Forty beneficiaries (7 percent) had not

¹ *Minnesota Statutes* 2020, 122A.635, subd. 1.

² *Laws of Minnesota* 1997, First Special Session, chapter 4, art. 5, sec. 28, subd. 9; and *Laws of Minnesota* 2017, First Special Session, chapter 5, art. 2, sec. 57, subd. 27. We refer to the program generally as CUGMEC throughout the report, even when referring to years when it was known by its previous name.

³ *Laws of Minnesota* 2019, First Special Session, chapter 11, art. 3, sec. 15.

⁴ We collected data on CUGMEC beneficiaries from grantee institutions and matched that data to teacher licensing and employment data. For further description of the data and methods used in our analysis of CUGMEC beneficiaries and the Minnesota teacher workforce, see Chapter 2 of the full report.

The CUGMEC grant program has undergone significant changes in recent years, and it is too soon to know the impact of these changes.

graduated and had not enrolled in 2020, while the remaining 48 (8 percent) withdrew from their programs.

Moreover, based on our analysis, two-thirds of the 171 CUGMEC beneficiaries who graduated between fiscal years 2016 and 2019 had obtained standard teaching licenses by July 2020. Almost three-fourths of these 171 graduates were employed as public school teachers in Minnesota at some point after graduation.

We surveyed CUGMEC beneficiaries and asked them to what extent their teacher preparation program provided sufficient support to complete the program.⁵ Eighty-five percent of survey respondents stated that their program provided “all” or “most” of the support they needed.

Based on our analysis, there has been a slight increase in recent years in the percentage of Minnesota teachers who are people of color or American Indian.

We identified several issues with the data PELSB maintains on teacher candidates and teachers. However, we determined that data from the 2015-2016 through 2018-2019 school years were consistent enough to provide a broad view of the state’s teacher workforce. In each of those school years, teachers of color and American Indian teachers comprised about 5 percent of the teacher workforce in Minnesota public schools, with about a half of a percentage point increase during that time.⁶

Additionally, the number of newly licensed teachers of color and American Indian teachers who were Minnesota graduates showed no consistent trend in recent years; districts reported a high of about 300 in the 2016-2017 school year but reported fewer than 300 in every other year.

A lack of reliable data on Minnesota teacher candidates and public school teachers’ race

and ethnicity makes it difficult to accurately determine the racial and ethnic composition of the teacher workforce. As a result, we recommend that PELSB standardize and improve the processes and systems used to collect data on teacher candidates and licensed teachers’ race and ethnicity.

PELSB’s grant award process met most requirements and was generally transparent, but some aspects of the process lacked clarity.

PELSB must meet statutory requirements when awarding CUGMEC grants. It must also adhere to policies established by the Office of Grants Management.

We reviewed PELSB’s grant award process for fiscal years 2020 and 2021. While PELSB’s process complied with most requirements, we identified room for improvement. For example, in Fiscal Year 2020, PELSB did not instruct reviewers on how to assign scores for each category in the application scoring rubric. PELSB provided more detailed instructions for scoring Fiscal Year 2021 grants. However, for some categories in the scoring rubric, reviewers had to provide one score based on multiple different data points, and the instructions did not clearly indicate how to calculate the score for each data point.

In addition, PELSB included most, but not all, of the information on which it must base grant awards in its application materials. The fiscal years 2020 and 2021 applications did not require applicants to provide information on how they would sustain support for teacher candidates. PELSB is required to determine award amounts, in part, on this information.⁷

Among other things, we recommend that PELSB ensure that the CUGMEC grant application and scoring rubric incorporate all information needed to meet requirements for awarding grants.

Our analysis indicated there has not been a significant change in recent years in the racial and ethnic composition of Minnesota’s public school teacher workforce.

⁵ We surveyed 268 CUGMEC beneficiaries who received tuition scholarships in Fiscal Year 2020, of whom 82 responded, for a response rate of 31 percent.

⁶ Due to issues we identified with these data, it is unclear whether the increase reflected an actual change in the racial and ethnic composition of the teacher workforce or unreliable data reporting and retention practices.

⁷ *Minnesota Statutes 2020*, 122A.635, subd. 2(c).

Without a clear focus, CUGMEC previously funded a variety of activities, but the grants have recently been awarded for a narrower use.

The Legislature has not defined a clear focus for the CUGMEC grant program.

The CUGMEC grant program was only recently codified in 2019; prior to that, appropriations laws did not clearly and consistently state the program’s purpose. Statutes currently indicate that the CUGMEC program is intended to “increase the number of teacher *candidates* of color or who are American Indian. . . .”⁸ However, statutes also indicate that PELS B must award the grants based on program outcomes related not only to teacher *candidates*, but also *teachers*, including teacher licensure and job placement rates.

It is unclear whether the Legislature, when codifying the program, intended to focus the program only on activities that would increase the number of candidates, as opposed to including activities further along the pathway towards becoming a teacher. Different interpretations of the program’s purpose may lead to different uses of funding.

In the absence of legislative direction, PELS B has prioritized CUGMEC funding for direct financial assistance to teacher candidates.

Requests for CUGMEC grants exceeded available funds in both fiscal years 2020 and

2021. With grant reviewers’ input, PELS B awarded most CUGMEC funding for fiscal years 2020 and 2021 for direct financial assistance to teacher candidates. In prior years, grantees used funds for a variety of activities, including administration and mentoring. Representatives from grantee institutions and other education professionals with whom we communicated had mixed opinions about how funds should be used. Some indicated concern about prioritizing direct financial assistance to teacher candidates at the exclusion of other uses of funding. Others indicated they agreed with PELS B’s prioritization.

We recommend that the Legislature: (1) clearly define the focus of the CUGMEC grant program, (2) outline how grant funding may be used and establish corresponding outcome measures, and (3) review requirements for awarding grant funds. We also recommend that, as the Legislature makes decisions related to CUGMEC, it determine how CUGMEC fits into Minnesota’s efforts to increase the number of teachers of color and American Indian teachers in Minnesota.

⁸ *Minnesota Statutes* 2020, 122A.635, subd. 1. [Emphasis added.]

Summary of Agency Response

In a letter dated February 24, 2021, Professional Educator Licensing and Standards Board (PELSB) Executive Director Alex Liuzzi and Chair Brian Rappe stated that “PELSB fully supports the findings and recommendations of this report.” They said “The findings in this report help highlight the ongoing limitations of PELS B’s current data systems. . . .” They also noted that, “The last biennium was the first time PELS B had administered a grant. . . . PELS B is grateful for the work of this report to highlight four remaining areas where PELS B can improve and clarify the grant application and review process.” Additionally, Director Liuzzi and Chair Rappe stated that “ongoing confusion over the legislative intent of the grant program remain,” and that PELS B looks forward to partnering with the Legislature and others to “strengthen and clarify the language in statute to ensure the grant program most effectively meets the goal of increasing teachers of color and American Indian teachers in Minnesota.”