

Serving Students Who Struggle:
A Document Serving the Recruitment and Calling Process Professionals at MLC
(The Conference of Presidents, Administrators, MLC Administrative Council, MLC REcruitment Officers,
and the MLC Governing Board)
Professors Daryl Hanneman and Kelli Green

NEED & REQUEST: In 2013 the state of Minnesota responded to the need for a licensure preparing more teachers able to serve students with mild to moderate disabilities. At about the same time there was an outcry from the district presidents across our synod for our called workers to be better equipped for responding to the same population of struggling students. The request was specifically for special education teachers.

MLC'S RESPONSE: Martin Luther College has responded to the requests from District Presidents across the synod for support specific to our struggling students. Dr. Alan Spurgeon and Professor Daryl Hanneman were instrumental in bringing a special education major to Martin Luther College to meet this need. Last year the first three graduates completed the program with knowledge, skills, and licensure as Special Education Teachers. In the Fall of 2018, Professor Kelli Green was called to join Professor Daryl Hanneman to continue training our graduates in the field of special education. Both Professor Green and Hanneman have background teaching as WELS called workers and within the public school systems. Having experience teaching within the WELS and public schools is a valuable vantage point in preparing our graduates since the public school resources are vast. Part of the picture of supporting our struggling students is to collaborate with public school specialists within the Response to Intervention (RtI) system for meeting the needs of our strategic and intensive learners. This year there are 17 students in our Academic and Behavior Strategist (ABS) program major and there is much interest in the program through the recruitment office. This past January a Special Education Task Force through the WELS Commission on Lutheran Schools began a formal conversation defining a common, reliable, and researched path for identifying and supporting learners struggling with academics and behavior. There is more to come as the formal conversation takes shape.

DEFINITION OF ABS PROGRAM LICENSURE: In Minnesota this special education license is called an Academic and Behavior Strategist (ABS) K-12 license. The course of study leading to this license enables special education teachers to serve students with mild to moderate needs across multiple disability areas. Minnesota's Professional Educator Licensing Board states, "The purpose of the ABS license is to prepare Special Education teachers to work across multiple disability areas. A teacher holding the ABS license is authorized to provide evaluation and specially designed instruction to eligible children and youth with disabilities from kindergarten through age 21 who have a range of mild to moderate needs in the areas of academic, behavior, social/emotional, communication and functional performance." Upon graduation, the candidate will take the MTLE Content-Area Test: Special Education Core Skills (Birth to Age 21) and submit application for the ABS K-12 licensure. Since our graduates are sent out across the country and beyond, the ABS license is flexible for issue within other states to teacher applicants who

complete approved out-of-state teacher preparation programs in mild to moderate cross-categorical or a multi-categorical special education.

VARIATIONS OF PROGRAMMING & CAPABILITIES OF THE GRADUATES: A candidate can single major in special education earning a K-12 Special Education teaching licensure. This single major limits the candidate to a call specific to only interventionist or special education work and is not recommended by MLC. A special education teacher candidate can double major, by adding Elementary Education and earning both a K-6 Elementary Education license and K-12 Special Education license. Another variation chosen by our special education candidates right now is adding the Early Childhood as a major earning both a Birth-3rd Grade Early Childhood Education license and K-12 Special Education license. There could be more variations in the future, but as you can see, our candidates are trained and licensed to meet a variety of needs within a wide age range.

HOW CAN THESE GRADUATES SERVE: Martin Luther College provides licensed special education teachers who can serve in a variety of capacities within our WELS schools, including: designing instruction across the tiers of a state or district's Response to Intervention (RTI) systems, consultation with WELS general education teachers and parents, collaboration with (and in support of) public school child find and special education teams as individualized support is sought after, and the ability to provide direct instruction for students who struggle in academics and behavior. Just as the Lord guides to creatively utilize all the MLC graduate candidates, the same is true of our newest Special Education teachers. They can be called to serve in multiple capacities for one church and school OR they can serve a grouping of schools. As calls specific to Special Education needs are beginning to be requested, the Special Education Task Force and MLC are working to create a mentor program to meet the unique skill set of understanding the Lutheran elementary school setting and collaboration with the public school system.

It is an exciting time in education as solutions are on the way to serve teachers and struggling students in our synod schools. Please contact the professors of special education at MLC for further information.