



MDE's Role in Addressing the Achievement Gap

Project Description

August 2021

BACKGROUND

On average, Minnesota students perform well on standardized tests (reading and math) and graduation rates when compared with those in other states. Beneath those averages, however, are large disparities by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. White and affluent students have persistently outperformed students of color, American Indian students, English language learners, and students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Minnesota's achievement gaps in these areas are some of the largest in the U.S.

In Minnesota, school districts and charter schools, governed by local boards, provide public education. The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) is the state agency responsible for overseeing public school districts and charter schools. Minnesota statutes establish a handful of programs and offices within MDE intended to address the achievement gap, among other purposes. These include World's Best Workforce, Achievement and Integration for Minnesota, and the Office of Indian American Education.

EVALUATION ISSUES

1. To what extent does state law require MDE to address and assess the achievement gap, and is MDE in compliance with these laws?
2. To what extent has MDE been effective in assisting school districts and charter schools with reducing their achievement gaps, and by what measures?

DISCUSSION

For this evaluation, OLA will focus narrowly on MDE and its role regarding the achievement gap.

We will conduct a legal review to determine what responsibilities and authority Minnesota statutes grant MDE with respect to the achievement gap. We will use interviews with MDE staff and reviews of internal documents and mandated reports to learn what the department does to satisfy those requirements. We will also review department files to evaluate the extent to which MDE has used its authority to hold school districts accountable for certain achievement goals.

We will conduct a survey of school district superintendents and charter school directors to examine how effective MDE has been in assisting those local education agencies to reduce their achievement gaps. We will also review academic literature on the achievement gap to identify effective methods of reducing the gap and ways to measure MDE's effectiveness with respect to supporting school districts and charter schools.

Local school districts and charter schools shoulder the bulk of the responsibility to address the achievement gap. As this evaluation is focused on MDE's role, OLA will not evaluate school district or charter school performance. Nor will we attempt to determine the effectiveness of any particular intervention that school districts and charter schools may use to reduce their achievement gaps. Further, we will not conduct our own analysis to determine the size of the achievement gap. We will rely instead on existing published sources of achievement-gap data to inform our work and provide background information in our final report.

This evaluation is scheduled to be completed in early 2022. For additional information, contact Sarah Delacueva, evaluation manager, at 651-296-1226 or sarah.delacueva@state.mn.us.