



Office of the Legislative Auditor
State of Minnesota

Minnesota Department of Education's Role in Addressing the Achievement Gap

March 8, 2022

Evaluation Scope

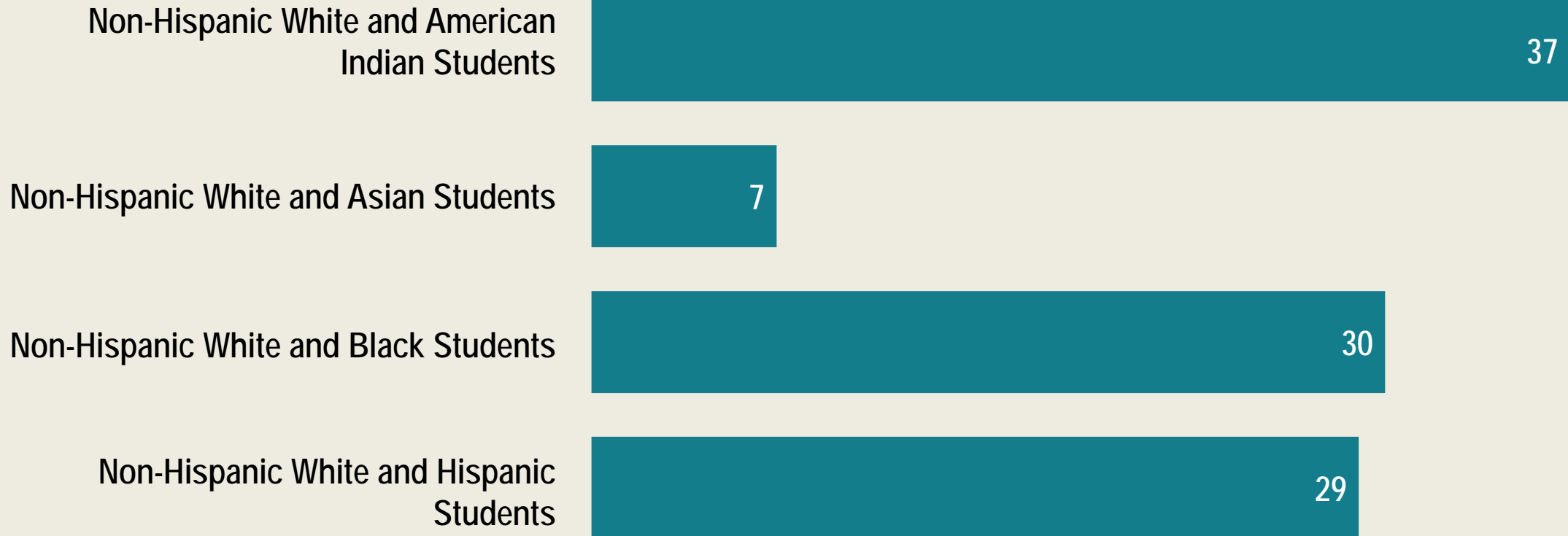
- The nature of MDE's role as defined by Minnesota statutes
- MDE's administration of certain K-12 education initiatives related to the achievement gap
 - World's Best Workforce
 - Achievement and Integration for Minnesota
 - American Indian Education
 - Regional Centers of Excellence

Achievement Gap Background

- The *achievement gap* is the difference in academic achievement or educational outcomes among different groups of students
 - Groups to be compared
 - How to measure

Minnesota's Achievement Gap: 4th Grade Reading

Difference in average NAEP scores, 4th grade reading (2019) between:



Achievement Gap in Statutes

- Minnesota law does not provide a single, clear definition of “achievement gap” or how it should be measured
- In general, Minnesota statutes do not clearly articulate MDE’s responsibilities *specific to the achievement gap*

Recommendations for the Legislature

The Legislature should consider:

- Defining the term “achievement gap” in law
- More explicitly defining MDE’s responsibilities

K-12 Education Initiatives Evaluated

- World's Best Workforce
- Achievement and Integration for Minnesota
- American Indian Education
- Regional Centers of Excellence

World's Best Workforce: Statutory Relationship to the Achievement Gap

- One of the five initiative goals is to “**close the academic achievement gap** among all racial and ethnic groups of students and between students living in poverty and students not living in poverty”

World's Best Workforce Findings

- MDE has annually reported to the Legislature
- The annual reports:
 - Have included districts that did not submit reports to MDE
 - Have ***not*** included districts that failed to meet their goals
- Statutes do not define “sufficient progress” or how it should be measured

World's Best Workforce Recommendations

- MDE should annually identify and report on school districts and charter schools that do not meet their World's Best Workforce goals
- The Legislature should define “sufficient progress” and how it should be measured

Achievement and Integration: Statutory Relationship to the Achievement Gap

- One of the program purposes is to “**reduce academic disparities** based on students’ diverse racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds in Minnesota public schools”
- Participating school districts must write a plan that includes at least one goal for **reducing disparities** in academic achievement
- MDE must evaluate the success of school district plans in **reducing academic disparities** and meeting other goals

Achievement and Integration Findings

- Statutes require MDE to review district progress by August 1 after plan ends
 - Statutory requirement impractical
- If a district does not meet its goals, MDE must develop a district improvement plan
 - MDE does not develop improvement plans
 - Statutes assign MDE an unreasonable amount of ownership over improvement plans

Achievement and Integration Recommendations

The Legislature should amend:

- The statutory deadline by which MDE must review school district progress toward goals
- Minnesota statutes to shift primary responsibility for improvement planning from MDE to school districts

MDE should:

- Take a more active role in helping school districts develop their improvement plans

American Indian Education: Statutory Relationship to the Achievement Gap

- MDE must develop a strategic plan and long-term framework for American Indian education; one of its goals must be to “**close the achievement gap** between American Indian students and their more advantaged peers”

American Indian Education

- MDE does not have a plan specific to American Indian education
- Department-wide plan not sufficient
 - Similar plans not required for other demographic groups
 - Department-wide plan treats most demographic groups the same

Plan sets a single 3rd grade reading proficiency goal for:

- **American Indian students**
- Students of color
- Students from low-income families
- English learners
- Students receiving special education services
- Students who are migrants
- Students experiencing homelessness

American Indian Education Recommendation

- MDE should develop a strategic plan specific to American Indian education

Regional Centers of Excellence: Statutory Relationship to the Achievement Gap

- Regional centers must work with school site leadership teams to build the expertise and experience to implement programs that **close the achievement gap**

Regional Centers of Excellence Findings

- MDE has satisfied statutory requirement to provide support
- Positive impact on schools served
- Services constrained by funding source, mostly Title I
 - Federal Title I funding → “comprehensive support” for 200 schools
 - Other federal and state funds → “targeted support” for 160 schools

Regional Centers Recommendation

- The Legislature should consider making the services of the Regional Centers of Excellence more widely available

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