

MDE's Role in Addressing the Achievement Gap

Update to 2022 Evaluation Report

February 2024

Problems Identified

- **Lack of Definitions.** Minnesota does not have a single, clear definition of “achievement gap” or how it should be measured, nor does it articulate the Minnesota Department of Education’s (MDE’s) general responsibilities related to the achievement gap.
- **Missing Strategic Plan.** By law, MDE must “develop a strategic plan and long-term framework for American Indian Education” that addresses the achievement gap between American Indian students “and their more advantaged peers.” MDE stated that its department-wide strategic plan fulfills the requirement; however, this plan does not offer strategies unique to American Indian education or students.
- **Inadequate Annual Reporting.** MDE’s annual legislative reports on the World’s Best Workforce program have not included a required list of school districts and charter schools that failed to meet their program goals, including reducing the achievement gap.
- **Limited Availability of Regional Centers of Excellence.** The regional centers (which MDE supports) address the achievement gap by providing intensive support to certain schools with low student test scores or graduation rates. While the centers have had a positive impact on the schools they serve, they support only about 360 of more than 2,100 traditional public and charter schools in the state.

Action Taken

- **Revised Reporting.** MDE’s 2023 World’s Best Workforce report to the Legislature reported whether school districts and charter schools met their World’s Best Workforce goals, including reducing the achievement gap.

Actions Needed

- **Define Terms and Roles.** The Legislature should amend Minnesota statutes to more explicitly define the term “achievement gap” and MDE’s role in addressing it.
- **Develop a Plan for American Indian Education.** MDE should develop a strategic plan for American Indian education that meets statutory requirements. While it should align with department goals, the plan should offer more specificity in the strategies it will use to serve American Indian students.
- **Expand Regional Centers of Excellence.** The regional centers are limited in the number of schools they can support, both by the size of their staff and the source of their funding; the centers’ base funding from the Minnesota Legislature remained \$1 million per year for fiscal years 2024 and 2025. The Legislature should consider making regional-center-style services more widely available as a way to help address the achievement gap.