

Minnesota Association of Colleges for Teacher Education

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MACTE Minute – January 2014 Progress through Effective Preparation

One of MACTE's goals is to increase participation in legislative and policy-making processes by being proactive in providing research & data to members and staff of the BOT, MDE and Legislature. Many policy discussions have recently centered on evaluating teachers and teacher education programs based upon increases in students' achievement scores and the achievement gaps that remain between different demographic populations. In this MACTE minute, we share some of the research and data summarized in Diane Ravitch's latest book, *Reign of Error*, which should be considered in upcoming conversations about effective teacher preparation, licensure, and program approval. Her review of research indicates that student achievement has steadily increased and achievement gaps for demographic groups have decreased over the last twenty years.

Individual state tests are based upon different standards with different achievement levels expected while the tests have changed several times over the last twenty years. Authoritative achievement comparison across states and time requires the use of the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) tests. NAEP is part of the U.S. Department of Education and has measured reading, math, and other subjects over the last forty years. "It is administered to a sample of students; no one knows who will take it; no one can prepare to take it; no one takes the whole test. There are no stakes attached to NAEP; no student ever gets a test score." (Ravitch, 2013, pg. 45) Unfortunately, NAEP achievement levels are often used incorrectly. Achievement does not need to be "proficient" to be considered effective, achievement that is "basic" or above demonstrates effective achievement. "Advanced" means achievement that is A+ level; "Proficient" means achievement that is B+ to A level; "Basic" means achievement that is B or C level; and "Below Basic" means achievement that is D level or below.

The NAEP tests show steady increases in reading and mathematics over the last twenty years. (See charts below) In addition the achievement gap has also been reduced. "Over this past generation there has been a remarkable decline in the proportion of African American and Hispanic students who register "below basic" the lowest possible academic rating on the NAEP tests. If white achievement had stood still, the achievement gap would be closed by now, but of course white achievement has also improved so the gap remains large." (Ravitch, 2013, pg. 56)

If increased achievement levels and reduced achievement gaps are indicators that we are training and employing effective teachers, then these NAEP results indicate we are making good progress. However, while the racial achievement gap is decreasing the income achievement gap is growing. "If we were serious about narrowing the gap, the schools attended by African American and Hispanic children would have a stable, experienced staff, a rich curriculum, social services, after-school programs, and abundant resources to meet the needs of students. Schools that have large numbers of inexperienced teachers and inadequate resources are ill-prepared to reduce the achievement gap." (Ravitch, 2013, pg. 59)

The assumption that effective teachers alone can solve the achievement gap ignores the impact of family and economic factors. "According to some economists, family accounts for about 60 percent of the variation in test scores, the school . . . is responsible for about 20 – 25 percent of the variation [and within school variation] teachers are the biggest component affecting how students perform on tests, possibly as much as 15 percent." (Ravitch, 2013, pg. 103) Those of us involved in preparing effective teachers can continue to raise standards and expectations to influence that 15 percent.

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Ravitch recommends that all teacher preparation programs should include the following requirements to strengthen the profession.

“Once they are admitted into a professional education program, they should engage in a year of study of such subjects as cognitive science, literacy, child development and adolescent psychology, the sociology of the family and the community, cultural diversity, the needs of students with disabilities, the nature of testing and the history, politics, and economics of education. They should deepen their knowledge of the subjects they plan to teach, with opportunities to plan lessons and work with mentors. They should practice teaching under the guidance of an experienced teacher. No one should be allowed to teach who has not spent a year in the study and practice of the profession.” (Ravitch, 2013, p. 275)

We can be proud that approved teacher preparation programs in Minnesota already meet these requirements by adhering to our rigorous Standards of Effective Practice and the PERCA process. By focusing on the importance of effective preparation, together we can continue to contribute to progress on student achievement.

NAEP Mathematics Achievement: Percentage of Students Scoring Above Basic, Percent Change from 1992 to 2011 (Adapted from Ravitch, 2013, Pgs. 334, 339)

Grade Level	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/Islander	Native American
2011 4 th Grade % Above Basic	91	65	72	91	66
4 th Grade Change	15%	32%	28%	8%	8%
2011 8 th Grade % Above Basic	83	52	61	85	55
8 th Grade	8%	16%	12%	20%	11%

NAEP Reading Achievement: Percentage of Students Scoring Above Basic, Percent Change from 1992 to 2011 (Adapted from Ravitch, 2013, Pgs. 341, 342)

Grade Level	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/Islander	Native American
2011 4 th Grade % Above Basic	79	49	52	80	47
4 th Grade Change	8	16	12	20	-11 (Decrease)
2011 8 th Grade % Above Basic	85	58	63	83	63
8 th Grade Change	4	13	15	7	5

Reference:

Ravitch, D. (2013) *Reign of Error*. New York, NY; Alfred A. Knopf.