

# Minnesota Association of Colleges for Teacher Education

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## 2014 Policy Issue: Closing the Achievement Gap

**Brief Description of Issue:** Analyses of student performance in Minnesota and across the country consistently demonstrate a gap in the achievement of students on the basis of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, and first language. Perhaps the most commonly cited gap is in test score performance, with majority group students outperforming other student groups on achievement tests. There are also documented gaps in graduation rates, drop-out rates, and in college and career readiness as measured by rates of application, acceptance, attendance, and completion of some form of postsecondary education. Some suggest that these issues are better identified as gaps in opportunity than achievement.

### Key Points:

- **The most powerful influence on a student's opportunity to learn, affecting 60% of their achievement, is the student's family, community, and socio-economic context.**
- **Good teaching is one of several school factors that have a powerful influence on student achievement.** In order to narrow current gaps of opportunity and achievement, teachers must have the skills, knowledge, dispositions, practices, and resources needed to effectively reach and teach all learners. While effective initial preparation for licensure is essential to prepare a teaching force to reach and teach all students, on-going learning opportunities through mentoring, induction, and professional development and adequate resources with which to teach are critical.
- **Evidence shows that the teaching cadre needs to better reflect the make-up of the student population.** As a result, effective efforts to recruit, support, prepare, license, and retain teachers from non-traditional and marginalized communities are essential to helping all learners succeed.
- **Strong leadership; curricula that prepare students for college and career readiness and life-long learning; safe and appropriately equipped classrooms; and parent participation programs are also necessary components for helping all students achieve to their full potential.** Funding, while not all that is needed to support these learning components, is essential.
- **Although assessments like the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) demonstrate an achievement gap, NAEP scores in reading and mathematics for 2013 show that Minnesota has made significant progress in narrowing the achievement gap between white students and students of color.** We can also lose sight of the gains made by all groups of learners when we focus only on gaps between groups. Diane Ravitch has noted, "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).
- **One factor often cited to bolster the idea of an opportunity, more than an achievement, gap is the growing income gap.** Too often, schools serving large numbers of low-income students also have the largest numbers of inexperienced teachers and inadequate resources. Although effective teaching can help address this gap, social and economic policies and funding to support changes for the 23% of US children living in poverty are also essential.

### Recommendations:

- Support programs committed to recruiting, supporting, preparing, licensing, and retaining a more diverse teaching force for Minnesota classrooms.
- Offer incentives to attract and retain experienced, highly effective teachers to work in the most racially and culturally diverse and economically challenged schools.
- Assure that policies to reduce opportunity gaps address and fund educational, social, and economic needs as a unified approach.

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