



Achievement and Integration

Report to the Legislature

As required by Minnesota Statutes 2022, section 124D.861, subdivision 5

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As requested by Minnesota Statutes 2022, section 3.197: This report cost approximately \$1,000.00 to prepare, including staff time, printing and mailing expenses.

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Legislative Charge

Minnesota Statutes 2022, section 124D.861, subdivision 5. The commissioner must evaluate the efficacy of district plans in reducing the disparities in student academic performance among the specified categories of students within the district, improving students' equitable access to effective and diverse teachers, and in realizing racial and economic diversity and integration. The commissioner shall report evaluation results to the kindergarten through grade 12 education committees of the Legislature by February 1 of every odd-numbered year.

Executive Summary

This report responds to the legislative charge to evaluate the efficacy of school districts' plans for realizing the goals included in school districts' Achievement and Integration plans. It includes information on one cohort of school districts with Achievement and Integration plans in July 1, 2019 to June 30, 2022. A second cohort has plans in effect from July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2023. The report synthesizes data submitted by school districts in the first cohort following implementation of their plans for a second year, 2021-2022. Data on the second cohort's plans was not available when this report was prepared.

Legislation requiring evaluation of school districts' Achievement and Integration plans was passed during the 2013 legislative session. Based on that requirement, Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) began asking participating districts to submit annual progress reports documenting outcomes for each year of their three-year Achievement and Integration plan. MDE asked districts to indicate the extent to which they were making progress toward their Achievement and Integration plan goals.

In addition to providing a means for evaluating these plans, the progress report was designed to have school district staff engage in a process of continuous improvement by reflecting on, assessing, and rethinking their work. It was also intended to create more opportunities for agency staff to provide technical assistance to districts. Finally, the progress report was designed for districts to use at an annual public meeting required to report on their Achievement and Integration programs (Minn. Stat. 124D.861, subd. 3 (b) [2022]).

To create efficiencies for districts and for the agency, the Achievement and Integration annual progress report was combined with another reporting function in fall 2018. The form MDE asked districts to use for their annual summary report of their World's Best Workforce plan appeared on the same form with the Achievement and Integration progress report. This combined form migrated to an [online survey format](#) in fall 2019.

Following the third year of implementing their plans, districts that do not meet one or more of their plan goals are to consult with the commissioner to develop an improvement plan (Minn. Stat. 124D.862, subd. 8 (c) (1) [2022]). That consultation may consist of meetings with school districts and written guidance. Improvement efforts for Achievement and Integration are designed to be specific to the types of goals, strategies and indicators of progress needed to realize the purpose of the program. At the same time, districts are advised to align their plans and coordinate their Achievement and Integration strategies with their other priorities and initiatives to avoid duplicating efforts and to improve the likelihood of realizing positive outcomes for students.

This *improvement planning* is meant to be an ongoing process of determining what's working, who is better off, and how data can be used to assess both. Because of the time lag between assessing progress toward goals and the need to submit the next Achievement and Integration plan to MDE for review and approval, improvement planning is based on districts' prior efforts and used to inform districts' current plans.

For districts that did not meet their goals, the commissioner must also use up to 20 percent of their annual Achievement and Integration revenue to implement the improvement plans until those goals are met (Minn. Stat. 124D.862, subd. 8 (c) (2) [2022]). MDE continued to actively support ongoing improvement planning efforts for districts that reported not being on track to meet the goals in their current plans.

In contrast with the previous three-year plan cycles, the commissioner did not ask school districts to include goals in their plans for decreasing achievement gaps or increasing student proficiency by 50 percent. Instead, districts set achievement goals that vary by content area, type of student outcome, metrics used to measure those outcomes, and student groups intended to realize those outcomes. Integration goals also vary by district. Typically, these goals included targets for conventional integration outcomes such as increased cultural competency, increased interest or ability to establish relationships with peers from racial or ethnic backgrounds different from their own, increased participation and representation of underrepresented students. For both types of goals, districts were asked to set targets that reflect positive outcomes for students, rather than outcomes for programs, e.g., increased levels of student engagement rather than higher enrollment targets for schools or trainings offered to staff.

During the 2016 legislative session, districts were required to add a third type of goal to their plans. This means that in addition to setting goals to increase racial and economic integration and reduce academic disparities for specific groups of students, districts must also add a goal for improving students' equitable access to effective and diverse teachers (Minn. Stat. 124D.861, subd. 5 [2022]). The first plans to include this third type of goal were those submitted by cohort two districts in their 2020-2022 plans.

Based on Minnesota Rules, part 3535.0110, subpart 1, districts participate in the program as either a racially isolated district, an adjoining district, a voluntary district, or because the district has one or more racially identifiable schools. Annual enrollment data determines whether a school is racially identifiable and a district is racially isolated. Adjoining and voluntary districts are determined by physical proximity to a racially isolated district (Minn. R. 3535.0170, subd. 1 [2022]).

Once approved, Achievement and Integration plans remain in effect for three years (Minn. Stat. § 124D.861, subd. 5 [2022]). This has the effect of creating stability for districts that experience frequent demographic shifts, which could change a district's status from being racially isolated to not being racially isolated, adjoining, etc. It also avoids creating a situation where districts invest time and effort into developing a plan only to be told months later they're no longer eligible for the program. The three-year timeline for plans applies to racially identifiable schools as well. This accounts for discrepancies between a school or district's status as determined by annual enrollment data and the school or district's inclusion or designation in its Achievement and Integration plan.

Introduction

The findings of this report are presented in two sections – one for districtwide plans and one for racially identifiable school (RIS) plans. Districtwide plans are those developed by racially isolated, adjoining, and voluntary districts. If MDE determined there was a racially identifiable school within a district, those districts created plans specific to those schools and reported on efforts to realize those school-level goals.

Districts submit plans with goals and strategies that address the needs of their students. Because racially isolated, adjoining, and voluntary districts are required to jointly plan for and implement cross-district integration strategies for their students to participate in together (Minn. R. 3535.0170 [2022]), their plans include the same cross-district integration strategies and identify their partnering districts.

Analysis

We have a total of 176 districts participating in the program. 130 in cohort one, which reported on the second year of their current plan cycle, and 46 in cohort two, which reported on the third year of their previous plan cycle. After implementing their achievement and integration plans for two years, 61 percent of cohort one's reporting districts (n=130) reported being on track or had met their goals by the time their plan ends in 2023. Out of 46 districts in cohort two, 50 percent reported meeting their plan goals at the end of year three. Seventy percent of racial identifiable schools reported being on track to meet their goals.

Districts' inability to realize the goals included in their plans was influenced by multiple factors, with a large factor being the Covid-19 pandemic. Districts have also shared struggles of implementing their Achievement and Integration plan due to:

- Inability to conduct cross-district activities and the fact that students could not meet face to face;
- Staffing problems – both the difficulty in finding staff for open positions, as well as, high staff turnover;
- Decline in enrollment leading to reduction in A and I funding.

Through technical assistance, many districts have shared an intent to rethink, adjust, and continue to implement the strategies in their plans in order to realize their intended outcomes. More districts are acknowledging the need to reduce barriers created by implicit racial bias. They are recognizing the need to increase the voices, representation, and meaningful participation of their American Indian students and students of color. Several districts are now revising their curriculum to either include ethnic studies courses or, more significantly, to revamp all courses to reflect the multiracial, multicultural experience of this country – whether or not their student body is racially diverse. These changes reflect the gradual shift of increasing awareness and an improved mindset that, if sustained, could lead to significant increased outcomes for all students over time.

Outcomes for racially identifiable schools (RIS) continue to be weaker than outcomes for districtwide plans. All but two of the school districts with an RIS are in the program because they are also racially isolated or adjoin a racially isolated district; Duluth Public Schools and St. Louis County Schools are the exception. The majority of

districts have significantly more districtwide strategies and support their districtwide plans with significantly more revenue than their RIS plans.

A comprehensive analysis utilizing multiple data sources is needed to identify the barriers to realizing school districts' goals and increasing the efficacy of school districts' Achievement and Integration plans.

Conclusion

Determining the efficacy of districts' Achievement and Integration plans is complex for a variety of reasons, including the following:

- the interplay between this plan and other district initiatives,
- the willingness and ability of adjoining districts to collaboratively implement student integration strategies,
- a fiscal incentive for maintaining racially segregated schools and for remaining racially isolated, and
- a lack of resources for MDE to conduct an in-depth, comprehensive evaluation of districts' capacity and willingness to use their plans to disrupt disparities for their students.

The Achievement and Integration program is unique in that it is the only state aid-funded education program with an explicit focus on increasing racial and economic integration and reducing achievement disparities. While the correlation between racially integrated schools and increased academic, employment, health and social-emotional outcomes for all students is well documented by social science research, creating and sustaining school systems that increase racial and economic integration and reduce achievement disparities for specific groups of historically underserved students remains elusive, while maintaining racially segregated schools continues to be the norm and to perpetuate race-based disparities.

Bibliography

Minnesota Department of Education. (2023). Achievement and integration program. Retrieved January 11, 2023, from <https://education.mn.gov/MDE/dse/acint/>