

Educational Inequality in Hennepin County:

Multiple Strategies of Intervention

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Introduction

Definition and Context of the Problem

The state of Minnesota has experienced decades of inequality, and has had a large achievement gap between students of different races and socioeconomic backgrounds. Before delving into the problem, it will be important to understand the terminology used throughout this report. For the context of this paper, educational inequality is defined as the combination of educators, health care providers, communities, and families that help a student learn and feel supported (“Educational equity...”, 2017). Socioeconomic Status (SES) can be defined as the level of income generated by any given household within a calendar year. A low SES is an annual household income of \$24,339, and a high SES is an annual household income of \$140,000 (“What is the Middle Class, Anyway?”, n.d.). Mid-range SES is directly between these two figures. The term “students of color” will also be used frequently, which encompasses non-white students from different races and minority students.

Our problem focuses on the achievement gap in Hennepin County, which is the gap in test scores, as well as high school graduation rates between students with low SES and students with high SES backgrounds (“Educational equity...”, 2017). At the local level, the state government in Minnesota has recognized the issue of the achievement gap, but there has not been a widespread sustainable solution in place. Students of color in Minnesota have one of the lowest on-time graduation rates. (Kraussel, 2017).

Our global focus for fixes to these inequalities is Germany. Germany has been a country that has had recent success in test-taking strategies including reducing the pressure placed on

schools and districts regarding standardized testing as a method of both the districts outward public appearance and the lack of test scores affecting district funding. Another global focus as is covered in following sections is the Netherlands approach regarding parent choice when it comes to school placement.

Intervention Strategy #1: School Integration

One strategy that can be used to tackle the issue of the achievement gap and educational inequality in Hennepin County is integrating schools. School integration is the process of ending segregation within school districts, ensuring that students of color and students from a low SES background are not located in the same schools. This strategy is based on the previously mentioned research that demonstrates students of color and low SES are not provided the same opportunities to succeed as white students or students with a high SES. This strategy involves creating a comprehensive plan for redistricting the Minneapolis school district. The key stakeholders involved in this plan include the Anoka-Hennepin School District School Board, the Minneapolis Board of Education, families, and the individual students.

Leadership Framework

The leadership framework that will be the most helpful for the school integration strategy will be the notion of Observe, Interpret, Intervene, which is described by the authors of *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*. Heifetz et al. (2009) describe this leadership framework by breaking down each step of the process; they state that adaptive leadership involves,

(1) Observing events and patterns around you; (2) Interpreting what you are observing (developing multiple hypotheses about what is really going on); and (3) Designing interventions based on the observations and interpretations to address the adaptive challenge you have identified (p. 32).

This process of observing, interpreting, and intervening (OII) occurs in an explicit order, which allows leaders to have a complete understanding of the system before trying to step in and make changes. Another aspect of this framework to consider is that it is a never ending cycle. Once the last step of interventions are complete, there needs to be new observations and new interpretations to see how the system has been impacted after interventions have been made.

We utilized the OII process in order to understand the issue of the achievement gap in Hennepin County. The first step of this process was to begin with the observations of the system that is already in place by extensively researching the information surrounding this issue. The primary goal for the observation piece is to be as objective as possible, thereby ensuring there was no bias influences (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 32), which would allow us to gather information that we might have missed if we did not stay objective. As demonstrated in the introduction of this paper, our observations were primarily based off of facts, statistics, and trends that had been observed by researchers studying the achievement gap. These observations proved that there was a significant achievement gap in Hennepin County between students of color and white students, as well as students from high SES and low SES.

After making observations of the system that is currently in place, the next step was to create some interpretations for why the system was perpetuated this way. The human brain makes interpretations based off of any patterns it may see in a problem, most of which will not

be more than a good guess (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 34). Hence, it is essential that alternate perspectives and hypotheses are examined to get a more complete picture of what is happening based off of the initial observations. The observations conducted regarding the achievement gap opened the door for a wide-range of potential interpretations for why this gap was occurring. The observations and research conducted open up so many different paths that could lead to an intervention strategy. The achievement gap can be connected to issues of child health, affordable housing, varying quality of schools and teachers, funds provided by the government, and lots of other various factors. The goal for interpretations is to consider as many factors as possible, so that the most effective intervention can be made.

After analyzing the list of observations and interpretations, it was clear that students of color and students with low SES mostly ended up in the same schools, which often had less funding and lower-quality teachers than that of a predominantly white school. Our observations and interpretations showed that this could be contributed to a lack of affordable housing, low SES families being located in the same areas, and school district boundaries being drawn in ways that congregated low SES students in the same schools. Well designed interpretations are based off of context, and take into account the resources needed to create change (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 35). The school integration intervention will look to alleviate some of these issue. That being said, the OII process should not stop after this plan is implemented, it should continue in order to fully address all aspects of the achievement gap in Hennepin County.

Research Base

In the past decade, the federal government has recognized that segregation in school districts is one of the biggest contributors to the achievement gap, which is why school integration is such an important strategy close that gap (Farley, 1975, p. 192). Residential segregation has been one of the leading causes in creating segregation within school districts, mostly because students living in the same areas are placed in the same schools. In a research study about the impact of residential segregation on education, Reynolds Farley (1975) found that, “court-ordered or voluntary desegregation plans confined to the central city initially have a substantial impact on the degree of school integration, even though residential segregation remains firmly entrenched” (p. 192). This demonstrates the possibility of policies being able to effectively desegregate both neighborhoods and schools, which can create numerous opportunities to eliminate the achievement gap and have a greater impact in tackling this issue.

In a research study done in California, the impact of racial and ethnic segregation on the achievement gap was observed within the high school setting. In this research paper, authors Rumberger et al. (1992) observed that, “Segregation may have adverse effects on minority achievement not only because of differences in educational resources but also because of differences in the racial and social class composition of the school” (Rumberger et al., 1992, p. 379). Having better integrated schools would allow for more students of color and students from low SES to have better opportunities to do well in school. Better-integrated schools would instantly reduce the pressures that force white families to leave neighborhoods and create more housing segregation (Orfield et. al, 2015, p. 28). In recent years, this has become a serious

problem in Minneapolis. In a study about the amount of segregation in Minneapolis, Orfield et al. (2015), who are researchers at the Institute on Race and Poverty at the University of Minnesota Law School, wrote,

By 2010 the number of schools made up of more than 90 percent non-white students had increased more than seven-fold (from 11 to 83); the number of non-white students in those highly segregated environments had risen by more than 10 times (from 2,000 to 25,400), a percentage increase from 2.5 percent to 16 percent; and the share of the regional population in majority non-white, high poverty areas rose by three times to 9 percent (p. 6).

Neighborhoods and schools are composed primarily of people from the same race and SES background, which is leading to schools of densely populated students from low SES backgrounds and families of color. This statistic is also alarming because it seems like school districts are going backwards on the efforts that put into desegregating societies.

In the Netherlands, the parents of students are given the choice to decide which school their child goes to, regardless of which neighborhood they live in. That being said, parents often pick schools that place their kids with kids of the same socioeconomic status and lifestyle (Hamilton, 2015). This type of system has led to more segregation in some cases, but this model of parental choice has been implemented and altered in U.S. cities, creating a much more positive effect. One example of this is in Champaign, Illinois. In an article about various integration strategies, journalists Potter and Quick (2016) wrote that in Champaign, "...families rank their top choices from among all schools in the district, and students are assigned based on an algorithm to ensure socioeconomic diversity. Under this system, 80 percent to 90 percent of

families typically receive their first choice” (p. 2). This system in Illinois combines parental choice and socioeconomic background in order to create a system that will allow the parents to have some say in where their child goes, while also ensuring schools have a diverse student body.

Besides parental choice, other school districts have tried alternative methods for integrating schools, which has had a positive impact on the achievement gap. In Eden Prairie, Minnesota, which is very close to Hennepin county, a redistricting plan was implemented. In 2010, the superintendent of this district and Somali parents worked to redraw elementary school boundaries to integrate schools in the majority-white Minneapolis suburb (Potter and Quick, 2016). This did create positive outcomes on the Minnesota schools in Eden. In 2013, the Minnesota Campaign for Achievement Now

(MinnCAN) School and District Report Cards ranked five Eden Prairie schools as the best performing public schools for Latino and Asian students (Bridges, 2016). *Figure 1* shows that the Eden Prairie elementary schools were able to achieve a nearly 50/50 split between white

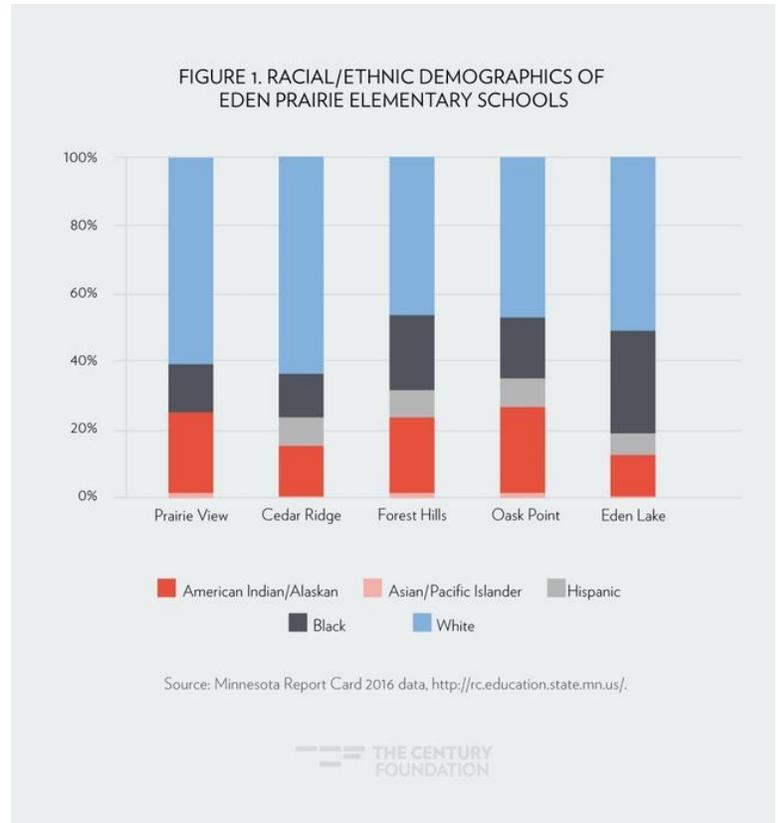


Figure 1: Eden Prairie Elementary Demographics

students and minorities. That being said, there was still a fairly large achievement gap reported between white and black students at the secondary level (Bridges, 2016).

Another strategy that was done in some Minneapolis school districts is The Choice is Yours (TCIY) program, in which families that have kids that qualify for free or reduced-price lunches in Minneapolis schools are given the option of open enrollment (“The Choice is..”, n.d.). This means that the parents have some choice in the schools that their kids can go to. The program also provides transportation to and from school, which makes it a viable option for integrating schools.

Overview of the Intervention

Description

The integration plan we have created is primarily based off of the parental choice plan that is widely used in the Netherlands, which was later adapted and improved in the United States. Our integration plan is a slight variation of the TCIY program mentioned above, except our plan incorporates both race and socioeconomic status. Parents in the Hennepin County school districts will be given the option to select three schools that they would like their children to go to. They will also need to provide information such as family income and race, which would help to ensure diversification of the student bodies in all the schools within Hennepin County. Students who are minorities and are from a low SES will take first priority in being placed in the schools that their parents have selected. If their number one choice doesn't have the capacity to take on any more students, the second school of choice will be selected.

An obvious, yet important first step of this intervention is to set clear system-wide goals for the integration process. Areas such as Stamford, Cambridge, Jefferson County and Champaign have system-wide goals: “All schools should be within a range of district-wide average for disadvantaged student populations and all have been quite successful in achieving integration.” (Kahlenberg, 2016). Applying this to Hennepin County, the Anoka-Hennepin School District School Board, and the Minneapolis Board of Education should come up with a clear guidelines for schools in the area to achieve socioeconomic diversity. That could be in the form of a policy where schools have to be within a range of an acceptable diversity ratio. In Netherlands, the Dutch city of Nijmegen regulated a 30-to-70 ratio of Dutch-born students and non-Western immigrants in their schools, which the government found to be effective enough to improve learning for the minority group, while not negatively impacting that of the majority group (Hamilton, 2015).

The next step would be to put a policy in place where it is part of the state constitution to guarantee integrated education. This worked for Hartford Connecticut, whereby the ruling of a Connecticut Supreme Court case in 1989 dramatically increased the spending and efforts on magnet schools and hence, they were able to offer the option that families with low SES backgrounds the same choices that families of high SES backgrounds have (Modesitt, n.d.). As mentioned, the Anoka-Hennepin School District School Board will start implementing a school integration policy, and the policy can slowly move up the court system to make school integration efforts be part of the Minneapolis Board of Education.

The creation of policies within school districts involves many different people; parents, teachers, students, the superintendent, and the school board can all contribute to the creation of

policies. When policies are created, they are most often created in a committee consisting of parents, teachers, and school administrators (Meador, 2017). It is essential that parents understand the policy's impact on them in its creation because their children might have to attend a new school. The policy we create would be shared with parents and teachers in Hennepin County. The next step would be to submit the policy to the superintendent for review. The superintendent would then submit the policy to the Anoka-Hennepin School District school board, who may reject or accept the policy, or even ask that it be revised (Meador, 2017).

One of the main concerns regarding school integration is the impact on students from higher SES backgrounds. Parents will always be worried that a disruption to their child's current educational system will cause some sort of issue. However, in an interview with Richard Kahlenberg, a researcher for The Century Foundation, journalist Anya Kamenetz (2017) found that, "the research shows that middle-class students tend to do as well academically in economically mixed schools. But more than that, there's emerging research to suggest that, indeed, middle-class students benefit from both economic and racial diversity" (p. 1). This research excludes race, but demonstrates that having schools with students from various SES backgrounds will be helpful for students.

Another group of people impacted by this plan would be students of color and students from low SES backgrounds. In Israel, a program was developed to move students from low SES backgrounds into schools with primarily high SES student populations. In a study that followed students throughout their six years in these integrated elementary school, the researchers found a positive impact on low SES students (Katz et al., 1992). In this study, Katz et al. (1992) concluded that, "Analysis indicated that pupils of lower socioeconomic status assigned to the

experimental group achieved significantly higher reading scores than pupils of lower socioeconomic status in the control group attending a non integrated school” (p.123). The group of low SES students attending integrated schools did significantly better than those attending segregated schools.

Besides the impact of integration on low SES and high SES students, the next thing that would be affected would be the quality of schools that become integrated. A common fear amongst parents with integrated schools is that, when schools become more integrated, the quality of the education might be reduced. However, a study on the benefits of socioeconomic and racial integration found that students that attend integrated schools have higher average test scores, are more likely to enroll in college, and are less likely to drop out (“The benefits of socioeconomically”, 2017). Hence, parents from both high and low SES background should look at integrated schools as a necessary improvement for their children’s educational career. In addition, integrating schools can help reduce disparities in access to highly qualified teachers, public and private funding, and proper facilities (“The benefits of socioeconomically”, 2017). That being said, moving students of color and students with low SES will have some negative impacts on the schools located in neighborhoods with poverty. These schools typically have fewer resources, attract less experienced teachers, and have high dropout rates (Quinlan, 2015). These schools will not gain resources right away, even if they do become more integrated. Integration is a stepping stone, but there will not any a substantial improvement in the achievement gap in those schools right away.

Resources Needed

There are numerous resources needed to implement such a large scale institutional change within Hennepin county. The need to disrupt the system, even though chaotic at first, would prove to be worthwhile. Two major resources needed would be funding, and a means of transportation for students.

With regards to funding, it is difficult to rely on the government because earlier this year, the Department of Education killed a federal program that was supporting diversity efforts through policies that promoted school integration by race and class (Kahlenberg, 2017). The initiative was supposed to provide \$12 million to school districts to boost socioeconomic diversity, but that funding is has now retracted and hence, “proponents of school diversity need to look beyond the federal government for support during Trump’s administration” (Kahlenberg, 2017). While we may still expect some funding from the government to administer some of the policies in place, funding could also come from sponsors. As mentioned in the same article, “With philanthropic support, these districts could form a community of practice to support one another and expand the number of districts pursuing diversity policies by showing how it can be done in a politically palatable way that is also good for kids.” (Kahlenberg, 2017). Having a self-sustained method of funding for school integration would allow for this program to refrain from shutting down, which an important aspect to consider especially with the recent budget cuts from the Trump Administration.

Part of the funding mentioned would go to transportation. In areas like Malawi in East Africa, transportation is one of the biggest issue as to why primary-school-age children do not go

to school; only 8 percent of students even complete secondary schools (Bruner, 2017). In this particular case, one pop icon, Rihanna partnered with a bike-sharing company to allow Mawali children to be able to attend schools by donating bikes (Bruner, 2017). Applying this concept to Hennepin county, part of the integration of schools is for students to have easy transportation access to attend the school of their choice- which would most likely be away from their own neighborhoods. Desegregation busing has been around since the Swann v.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education case in 1971, with the Supreme Court ruling that the practice of using mandatory busing to integrate schools (DeWitt, n.d.). By the 1990s, mandatory busing slowly faded across the United States due to the change in housing patterns, but it is necessary to bring back those means as a way to integrate schools in Hennepin County (DeWitt, n.d.). Although busing students is more of a technical fix, it is necessary to be able to reassure parents and their children that they can go to a school not in their neighborhood with easy access.

Evaluation

The evaluation method for this strategy involves two key factors. One of the factors that needs to be taken into consideration is the plan's impact on the achievement gaps. This would be done by recording the ability of Hennepin County to reduce the disparities in academic performance for students of color and students from low SES backgrounds. This would be done by examining test scores in the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA) for students within integrated schools, which includes math, reading, and science. The ultimate goal would be for students of color and students from low SES backgrounds would score higher than they did the previous year, and eventually to score just as well as students from higher SES. It would also

be important to examine the scores of students that were already doing well to make sure their scores didn't drop.

Another way to evaluate this strategy is to do a demographic analysis of each school within Hennepin County. After this plan is implemented, schools should ideally not have a population of white students that is 70% or higher, which was part of the goal for this strategy. Achieving this ratio would be ideal in terms of integrating schools within Hennepin County.

Timeline

Introducing such a reform to Hennepin County to lower the achievement gap will take a considerable amount of time. A clear timeline is needed for schools to be able to achieve school integration goals. Policies are important in making the goals that are needed to achieve the goals that were set for this school integration program. *Figure 2* gives the overall timeline for the process of creating a sustainable school integration program.

A more direct way of implementing policies would be for the Anoka-Hennepin School District School Board to start the school integration program within the next year by first encouraging schools to support the school integration program and then implement a policy in the next year or so. Moving up the ranks, we could then aim for the Minneapolis Board of Education to include it as part of their regulation within the next 3 years. As policies are rolling out, schools can begin the integration process even before the policies are made official. In the following school year, schools can start to use parents' choice of schools to make admission decisions. With regards to the buses, even before schools start to integrate, manpower and

resources for the buses can be planned to ensure that once the academic year starts, students are able to get to their schools with ease.

Overall, the school integration process would be a longer-term process. Right now we are looking to evaluate the process annually to improve the processes as the years go on, and also a more extensive evaluation process in 5 years when some students in these schools would have graduated. We aim to have all schools in Hennepin County to reach school integration goals in 10 years.

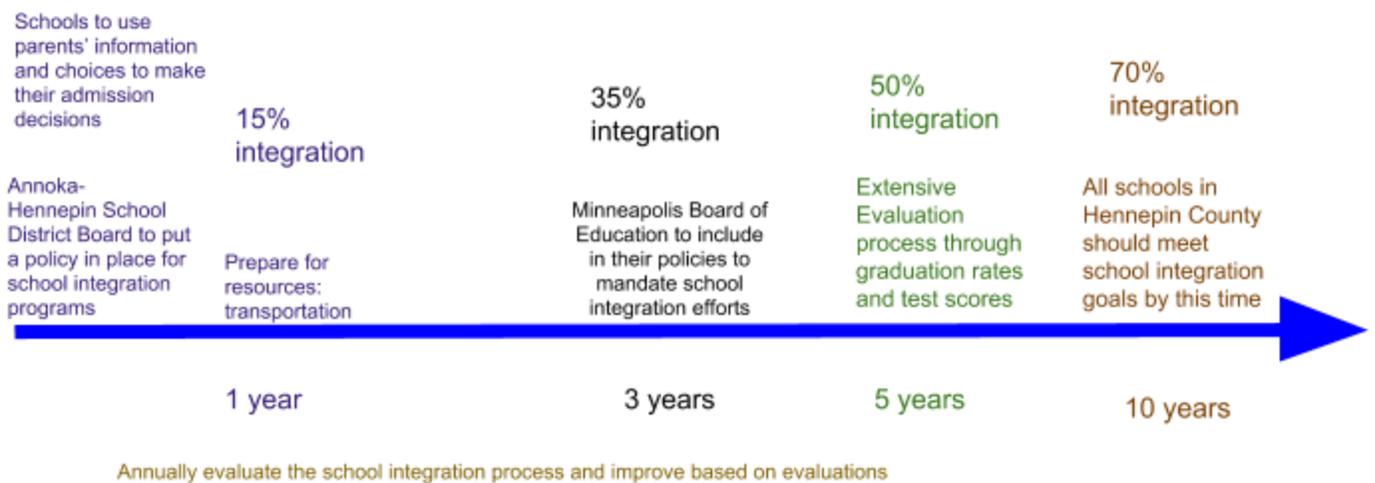


Figure 2: Timeline for the School Integration Program in Hennepin County

Intervention Strategy #2: Reframing Standardized Testing

Reframing standardized testing is perhaps the most extreme strategy in improving educational inequalities within the Hennepin County School District and the U.S. as a whole. However, there are numerous global examples of it being done with promising results. Germany is an example of a modern country that has reduced its academic inequality. The Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), which administers the triennial Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) among its roughly three dozen member countries, found that Germany was one of only three countries that had improved equality and math scores from the period of 2003-2012. The other two were Turkey and Mexico. It is pointed out that “Germany now ranks 20th for math proficiency; the U.S., meanwhile, is 49th, just behind Turkey” (Berwick, 2015). Germany doesn’t penalize schools for poor performance like the US and does not publicize school-level test scores (Berwick, 2015). The focus is instead on providing school-based support. This is done while monitoring and targeting the most disadvantaged students.

Leadership Framework

First and foremost, the concept of Observation, Interpretation, Intervention discussed earlier was at the forefront of our minds during the process of researching and coming up with strategies of intervention.

That being said, the Leadership Framework utilized in this specific strategy is the concept of bright spots as described by D. Heath et al., (2010),

That's the first step to fixing everything from addiction to corporate malaise to malnutrition. A problem may look hopelessly complex. But there's a game plan that can yield movement on even the toughest issues. And it starts with locating a bright spot — a ray of hope.

This concept of bright spots as discussed in the 4000 level Leadership Minor class is to not solve problems with fresh ideas when there is a possible, viable, existing solution which has been shown to work in similar contexts. This concept was further described by Heath et al., (2010) by describing the story of malnutrition in Vietnam. It was found that while a majority of children in poverty were malnourished, there was a small group of children that were not. While issues of sanitation, poverty, lack of clear water, and ignorance of nutrition were prevalent, a subset of children were able to maintain nourishment despite the bad living conditions. This is where the bright spots concept comes in. Those malnourished children did not have the time to wait years for the larger adaptive problems to be solved, so another way had to be found. This is when it was decided to observe what the families of the well nourished children were doing differently - to search for bright spots. Many interesting things were found by the observers - the “bright spot moms” fed their children meals four times a day with the same amount of food rather than two. Next, feeding was more active, rather than allowing children to help themselves, portions were distributed and children would be fed by hand if necessary. Finally, and perhaps the brightest spot was that,

The bright-spot mothers were collecting tiny shrimp and crabs from the rice paddies and mixing them in with their kids' rice. (Shrimp and crabs were eaten by adults but they weren't considered appropriate food for kids.) The mothers also tossed in sweetpotato

greens, which were considered a low-class food. These dietary improvisations, however strange or "low class," were doing something precious: adding sorely needed protein and vitamins to the children's diet (Heath et al., 2010).

Similar to the way that observers looked for low cost, quick fixes to the problem malnutrition in Vietnam, we have researched bright spots in the area of educational inequality which could be applied to Hennepin County, which lead us to Germany as discussed in the previous section, and analyzed in the next.

Research Base

Standardized tests (assessments) are tests administered to students of the same grade level through multiple districts, states, and even countries. These tests are scored and analyzed using the same rubric and were thrust into the spotlight, and the classroom, at the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act (Popham, 1999). This act was created to hold schools accountable for the materials learned by students at each grade level. For example, a standardized curriculum, or a measure of where students should be, was developed for third graders. At the end of the academic year, third graders around the country would take a test which would cover material mandated in the standardized curriculum. Should a school have consistently low scores on these tests for multiple years, funding to the school would decrease (Popham, 1999). This created a system of competitiveness among public and private schools (Popham, 1999).

Finally and perhaps most interesting, standardized test scores should not be used to determine the level of school funding because contradictory to the assertions made by the No Child Left Behind Act, test scores are only influenced about 30% by the quality of instruction

and 70% by the students “native intellectual ability” and “out of school learning” (Popham, 1999) meaning that the base rationale behind dividing funds unequally among lower performing schools due to lack of adequate instruction techniques is against the facts presented in most academic research around the topic (Popham, 1999).

Overview of the Intervention

Description

With our second strategy focusing on reforming the way school districts take on testing, we utilized Dr. Heifetz’s teachings regarding technical and adaptive leadership (Heifetz, 2002). This was done in conjunction with the idea that there are bright spots (Heath et al., 2010) within this issue that allow for improvements to the educational experience and success of each student. For instance, the issues regarding testing may seem to be easy to identify, such as stress levels increasing for students, parents, teachers, administrators, and the school district itself. In the current system, schools are rewarded for higher testing scores and improvements (Popham, 1999). Currently, the Trump Administration has not delivered an exact plan as to how it will take on educational reform. Therefore, our focus was on how effective past reform done through the Obama Administration was and if it included strategies that we wanted to add into our plans for Hennepin County.

Throughout the Obama Administration, changes were made with how the government was involved in education across the national level in terms of funding, grants, and initiatives. Approximately \$360 million was “invested in two consortia of states that had developed new assessments aligned to college- and career-ready standards that moved beyond traditional bubble

tests, and focused more on critical thinking, problem solving, and writing” (“Progress in Our Schools,” n.d.).

Germany is a country that has taken the focus of why students and school districts are failing and have applied an approach that does not punish districts that perform lower than core standards. Their approach has been to continue to have testing done but have each district’s results remain anonymous in terms of publication. A stronger focus has been on immigration and educating students who have moved to Germany and may be struggling (Berwick, 2015). This has resulted in some of the largest growth in test ratings in the world, as their mathematics department has improved greatly. Berwick (2015) discovered “In fact, Germany was one of just three countries surveyed by the OECD that reduced inequality while raising math scores between 2003 and 2012, the other two being Mexico and Turkey.”

America has somewhat applied this concept to its educational department by adding new initiatives to educational reform with the idea that test-taking will become less difficult for the educators and students themselves. The main focus in education at moment is to develop teachers’ knowledge and instruction practices in order to improve student achievement. As Cochran-Smith (2005) state, “This notion reflects a prevailing view that the policy community will support and promote those research-based programs that contribute to building a chain of evidence linking teacher education to teacher knowledge to classroom practices that in turn affect student learning.”

The Department of Education during the Obama Administration created certain efforts to support great teachers and teaching, such as The Excellent Educators for All Initiative, that aims

to help states and school districts support talented educators for the students who need them most (“Progress in Our Schools,” n.d.)

It is unknown whether the Trump Administration will continue to fund these programs, but it at least displays a general trend toward better funding in schools that may need better educators to achieve academic success in testing. Another initiative, Teach to Lead, co-managed by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, was established during the Obama Administration. Its goal is “to advance student outcomes by expanding opportunities for teacher leadership—particularly those that allow teachers to stay in the profession they love” (“Progress in Our Schools,” n.d.)

These solutions are strategies that rely on the idea that achieving higher test scores in districts with less funding and more diversity is a technical problem. Germany is an example of a country that applied technical solutions to the issue of low test scores and achieved success in raising them within a decade. However, the country also understood that the testing dilemma was also an adaptive challenge that required understanding all reasons why a district may be performing lower than the national average.

The Obama Administration tried to tackle this issue by observing educational reform as an adaptive challenge. In January 2014,

the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice released a first-ever package of guidance and resource materials intended to help schools and districts address the overuse of exclusionary discipline and disproportionate rates of discipline for students of color and students with disabilities (“Progress in Our Schools,” n.d.)

A data collection also took place to better understand what affected the achievement gap in the classrooms across the country.

The Civil Rights Data Collection also shined a spotlight, for the first time, on opportunity gaps across a range of indicators, including student retention and access to rigorous coursework. A first-ever summit in the summer of 2015 convened by the White House also brought together teams of educators and administrators from across the country to discuss positive school climates” (“Progress in Our Schools,” n.d.)

These examples of reform result in lifestyle changes in the form of experiments, new discoveries, and the gradual ability to better identify the values, beliefs, roles, relationships, and approaches that affect the purpose and success of testing for students. There must be a realization that these changes take time to fully implement from an adaptive standpoint and requires the efforts of the entire educational community. Technical solutions, such as increasing the spending per student, teaching programs, and retention strategies, can provide a temporary fix but will not continue to serve its purpose unless programs are established that truly target the personal and lifestyle perspectives as well.

Resources Needed

Our strategic plan calls for the integrated efforts of all that it takes for a community to experience positive growth and change in any educational situation: teachers, administration, parents, and students. Allocating funds to the school districts is a technical solution to a problem that poses adaptive challenges, as was discussed earlier. We feel that avoiding publicizing test scores is necessary in order to avoid the competitiveness and negative associations toward

schools that may be performing at lower levels than other schools within Hennepin County. Hennepin County allows open enrollment, so publicizing districts with lower test scores will result in low retention rates for students and teachers.

Retention should be a main focus for schools that have experienced low scores in the past. Resources that can help with this include “Teacher Service Scholarships” and “Teacher Residency Programs” to cover costs of teacher education for recruits that have committed to teaching in a high-need location or field within Hennepin County. This was one of the educational priorities laid out by the Obama Administration that we feel is something that can be continued on a smaller scale within the county level. In terms of retaining and rewarding teachers, expanding “mentoring programs that pair experienced teachers with new recruits” and “rewarding with a salary increase accomplished educators who serve as mentors to new teachers” (*The Agenda: Education, 2009*).

Evaluation

Similar to the evaluation criteria of our first strategy, the implementational effectiveness of removing standardized testing from school funding criteria would be measured by the increase or decrease in the number of students persisting from highschool to college, post high school graduation in Hennepin County.

Additionally, the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs) as covered earlier will be extremely beneficial in the long run in determining if, in fact, this method of reducing reliance on standardized tests for purposes of allocating funds to districts within the state has had any sort of impact on the generalized learning of a sample institution.

Timeline

The timeline for this testing reform strategy requires understanding what the goal is for the school districts within Hennepin County. These goals should be discussed, reviewed, and finalized with the parents of students involved in the process. This can take place by having guests at school board meetings and providing the opportunity to send suggestions to the administration. Having all of these steps occur prior to finalizing a plan is important because it allows everyone to speak their mind in a productive format and gives the administration time to gather all of the thoughts and opinions. The next step would be to examine what funds could be allocated to each district and how it would be structured. With our strategy, we would have funding going to lower-achieving districts. The manner in which this is done is a step that will require the assistance of all school districts within the county. A voting system may be the best way to go about deciding on values in terms of funds available for each district. The pushback from districts that are succeeding may take place and create tension for this meeting. It is important that the leaders of the meeting provide factual and statistical support to defend the plans and provide a plan for which to follow. The teacher initiatives for rewarding faculty that stay within districts of need and advise recruits and new faculty is also a matter that should be discussed at these meetings. This will, in turn, create a more inviting atmosphere and more opportunities for all districts involved within the county. Students from Hennepin County will have more equal opportunities and the achievement gap from one school to the next will lessen. Providing all of the plans for educational reform within Hennepin County prior to actually executing the actions may create stress for those involved and be overwhelming at first. To

combat this, we feel that it may be best to provide all of this information in a series of meetings. Majority in favor is an effect that we would like to have at this point. By providing a step-by-step guide, global and national examples, and the opportunity for people to voice their opinions, we feel that it can be done. After these meetings have occurred, the following school year allows the districts and county to test the plan. Each of the following years will require analyses, check-ups, and the care from those administering this plan. The positive effects of Germany's testing reform took place within less than five years, and that is the goal with our strategy.

1. First year

- A. Set up plan for testing reform with representatives from each district
- B. Review all possible funding that can be allocated to districts of need
- C. Create a model for each district to follow that takes place over five years and is available to everyone
- D. Conduct informational meetings with each district
- E. Allow for suggestions and hold larger meetings that welcome multiple districts

2. Second year

- A. Start the testing reform and teacher initiatives
- B. Provide meetings throughout the year that gather teachers, parents, and administrators
- C. Continue to analyze whether districts are able to follow the plan

3. Third year

- A. Analyze results and change if issues arise

B. Fourth and fifth years follow the third**Summary**

The achievement gap has been a longstanding issue in Hennepin County, with segregated school areas still prevalent today, despite major efforts for desegregation in recent history. Our interventions focuses on making deliberate efforts to reduce the achievement gap by school integration and reframing testing. Our first intervention focuses on furthering desegregation efforts through school integration policies and programs, by implementing a system whereby there will not be districts that differentiates areas of high achieving and low achieving schools.

Our second intervention involved the reduction in reliance on standardized tests as a means of determining school/district funding and instead allocating funds based on school/district size and general need for that funding. This means that instead of districts being allocated funds who are already considered to be in good academic standing, districts that are in need of the funds will not be penalized for being in that position. The hope would be for this to create more equitable districts among Hennepin County.

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