

Dissenting Report

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Introduction.

We appreciate the opportunity to participate as a member of the CCRPI Assessment and Accountability Working Group. We'd also like to recognize the leadership and members of the Working Group for their time and dedication. Unfortunately, we **cannot** support the Group's final recommendations.

To be clear, the Partnership, which represents chief executives of the state's largest employers, opposed the 2009 legislation that placed a moratorium on the 11th grade graduation test in math. Failing to expect high school students to achieve at or above grade-level to earn a diploma sends a troubling message. However, we're committed to exploring opportunities to improve current practices and we approached the Working Group's task accordingly.

Consistent with the following principles, we have been active participants in Minnesota's long journey to developing, implementing and refining Minnesota's statewide standards and accountability system:

- Set rigorous, world-class, academic standards for all students.
- Measure and report student progress – individually and by school – on a uniform and comparable basis.
- Give educators flexibility to offer programs they consider most effective.
- Provide families with information and the ability to choose the programs that best meet their children's academic needs.

As the background section of the report points out, the Legislature first adopted a high school exit exam requirement in 1992. We have had two versions since then. The Basic Skills Tests (BSTs), first effective for the Class of 2000, followed by the Graduation Required Assessment for Diploma (GRAD), first effective for the Class of 2010.

The primary reason for adopting the above state exit exams is to ensure all high school graduates are able to meet certain academic expectations. The need for objective state high school exams has been highlighted for nearly twenty-five years, in recognition of disparate instruction and expectations for student achievement.

One of the more recent examples of instructional disparities was found in the analysis of Minnesota's participation in the 2007 Trends in International Math and Science Studies (TIMSS). In short, researchers found substantial differences in the math and science content students were taught, depending on whether their schools served predominately high or low-income students.

Other reasons for concern about whether students are being prepared for, and graduating from high school having met state expectations include the fact that only 47% of non-white students graduate within four years

(52% within five years), the large number of students requiring remedial coursework in public post-secondary institutions and low employer satisfaction levels.

These concerns are not limited to the preparation of students in our core urban districts. The report on post-secondary remediation prepared by the University of Minnesota and the Minnesota State Colleges and University (MnSCU) system, *Getting Prepared*, highlights large numbers of graduates from districts across the state needing remedial coursework in reading and math.

These statements are not intended to disparage the many dedicated and effective educators Minnesota is fortunate to have serving our children. Rather, they are an observation that we must continue to focus on ensuring all students have the academic preparation needed to succeed in our increasingly global environment.

Finally, it should be noted the percentage of non-white students performing at grade-level and above on the reading MCA-II jumped by 14% from 2007 to 2009, the reading GRAD first became effective in 2008. While the corresponding growth in the percentage of non-white students performing at and above grade-level on the math MCA-II was 4%, there was also a 22% increase in the number of non-white students taking the test.

MBP Position.

While the Partnership's preference would be to restore the math GRAD requirement, we find merit in some of the recommendations put forward by the working group. Specifically:

- End-of-course testing in algebra 2 and biology – creating a stronger link between standards, instruction and assessment;
- Comprehensive reading and writing test, with the expectation students must pass to earn a diploma;
- Creation of an alignment index to monitor discrepancies between end-of-course test results and corresponding course grades;
- Providing educators with necessary supports such as curriculum frameworks, expansion of the math and science academies and test item banks; and
- The attempt to highlight the need for high school students to be college and career ready.

Unfortunately, other components of the working group's recommendations substantially reduce the role of objective statewide measures of student achievement. For example, having state end-of-course exams count for only 25% of a course grade invites continued achievement gaps and grade inflation. While the alignment index might address concerns about grade inflation, there aren't sufficient consequences to make it effective.

In short, in the critical areas of math and science, Minnesota would revert to a policy that allows disparities in expectations and instruction to grow.

Potential Remedies.

The fundamental flaw with the task force's recommendations is the loss of a connection between student performance on state standards-based assessments and the granting of a diploma. Without this connection, common expectations for student achievement will be diminished.

Options for reinforcing statewide standards and expectations include:

- Create an Advanced diploma for students who score at or above grade-level on each of the three tests (e.g. English, algebra and biology) and meet all other requirements. Students who don't score at or above grade-level on the tests, but only meet the task force requirements would earn a Basic diploma.
- Set scores on each of the three tests that indicate student performance at grade-level, and require students to pass each test to earn a diploma. Students who don't pass each test, but meet all other requirements would receive a certificate of attendance.
- Increase the amount of the end-of-course test result that counts toward the respective course grade from 25% to 50%, and set a minimum score that students must meet to pass.

Options for making the alignment index more effective include:

- Allow students enrolled in schools with three years of high misalignment to enroll in any other school of their choice (public or non-public).
- Schools with high misalignment after two years would send written notification to all parents in grades 7 – 12, and be required to use discretionary professional development funds to mitigate misalignment.

If no improvement after four years, schools lose ability to grant diplomas based on course grades.

If no improvement after five years, the district loses ability to grant diplomas based on course grades.

Options for strengthening the overall proposal include:

- Students who score at or above the College and Career Ready level on any of the three tests will be exempt from required enrollment in any corresponding post-secondary remedial course if they enroll within two years of high school graduation.

Students who score at or above the College and Career level on all three tests will get a 10 percent increase in the amount of state post-secondary financial aid they're eligible to receive.

- The passing score on the reading test must be set at least at grade-level performance, without a two year implementation delay.
- Commit to phasing-in end-of-course tests in geometry, chemistry and physics.

Strengthening the connections between state academic standards, classroom instruction and assessment of student achievement is critical to raising Minnesota's overall student preparation, and closing our unacceptable achievement gaps.

The options listed above offer a range of opportunities to not only benefit from the working group's efforts, but also reinforce Minnesota's approach to standards-based education.

We look forward to working with the public, policy-makers and educators to not only develop effective criteria for high school graduation, but also to ensure students have had appropriate instruction prior to high school.

Thank you.