

A Comparative Analysis: Ensuring Equitable Access to Excellent Educators

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Rationale

Students in high-minority and high-poverty schools consistently have more teachers with less experience, more teachers who are teaching outside their field, more teachers who are not certified, fewer highly qualified teachers and fewer highly effective teachers. This inequity contributes to the achievement gap between poor and affluent; and minority and white students. In light of this information, the US Department of Education revised requirements from an ESEA renewal to an ESEA request for flexibility, removing the equity plan requirement and adding it later for all states due June 1, 2015. On July 7, 2014 the US Department of Education launched the Excellent Educators for All Initiative. States were asked to analyze their data, consult with stakeholders and create new, comprehensive educator equity plans to provide local solutions ensuring every student has an effective educator. Four million, two hundred thousand dollars was invested to develop model plans, share promising practices; and provide a space for educators to discuss challenges, share lessons, and create a network of educators working in high need schools. The Results: Education Week's report card rated all states on several measures including equity. The District of Columbia received an equity rating of "F" while Maryland earned "B-" and Virginia earned a "C+". This action research analyzes the reasons for the differences in equity scores from neighboring states Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia.

Literature Review

All U.S. states were required to submit a plan to the US Department of Education by June 1, 2015 outlining how they would decrease the achievement gap in educator equity. The plans can be found on the US Department of Education's Website. Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia's Plans have been reviewed along with a study conducted by George Washington University on the effect of the District of Columbia's evaluation system – a huge part of DCPS's plan for increasing educator equity. Notable sources are listed below.

Kang, Hanseul, "An Excellent Teacher for Every Child: District of Columbia Plan to Ensure Equitable Access to Educators", Office of the State Superintendent, 2015. Web. 4.30.2016

Walsh, Elias and Dotter, Dallas, "Longitudinal Analysis of the Effectiveness of DCPS Teachers". DC Education Consortium for Research and Evaluation. School of Education and Human Development George Washington University, 2014. Web. 5.1.2016.

NP. "Maryland State Plan to Ensure Equitable Access to Excellent Educators". Oct. 2, 2015. Maryland State Department of Education. Web. 4.29.2015.

Virginia Department of Education. Virginia's Plan to Ensure Excellent Educators for All Students. June 2015. Web. 5.10.16

Data/Process/Tools

The US Department of Education specifically asked states to analyze their data, consult with stakeholders, and create a new, comprehensive plan to address educator inequity issues locally. ESEA, Title 1, and state law requires data collection on basic student demographics, including race, participation in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program, and teacher certification level. The Education Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) and the Education and Secondary Education Act of 2001, No Child Left Behind legalize the collection and reporting of this data.

States then used this data to analyze and create the plans being critiqued in this action research. Analysis of root causes of inequity, strategies for eliminating equity gaps, and suggested solutions are compared between the three local education agencies.

Data Analysis

Though US DOE's initiative specifically asks states to create a new comprehensive plan, all three states built their plans on the foundation of work completed for the ESEA flexibility renewal plan. Each state or district offered specific root causes for the inequities, strategies to address the root causes and solutions to address the reported inequity in excellent educators across schools with high levels of minorities or poverty.

There were some similarities but there were also some stark differences between the three plans. A critique of Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia's plans revealed that less robust data was collected and analyzed across the local education agencies, respectively.

Virginia showed the lowest achievement gaps and educator inequity of each LEA. Also, it was very clear that Virginia has collected the proper data and asked the proper questions about relative educator equity data in order to effectively develop strategies to increase educator equity and decrease the gap in achievement between its minority and poor student population and affluent, white populations.

Virginia provided adequate evidence of data collection and analysis. Their analysis demonstrated where their inequities lie; allowing the development of targeted strategies and solutions to target those inequities. In Math, Virginia showed more Appropriate Content endorsements in high poverty schools than low poverty schools. This provides supporting evidence that one of the initiatives Virginia put in place, the Middle School Math Initiative, was successful.

Virginia also had notable differences in their definition of an inexperienced teacher. A new teacher is considered to be any teacher with less than 3 years of experience. In DC, comparisons were made in the level of effectiveness between year 1 and 3. With the highest level of effectiveness leveling off at year 3. Virginia has done its research. The numbers are meaningful, substantive, carefully analyzed and reported. Virginia reported needing to obtain more "effective" teachers in foreign language and special education.

Maryland also reported lots of positive numbers. There was a 20-point increase in the number of highly qualified teachers during the initial phase of data collection and plan implementation that took place

from 2004-2014. In 2004, 75% of teachers were highly qualified and in 2014, 95% of teachers were highly qualified. Though it is not clear if the teachers were placed in high-minority or high-poverty schools the increase is undeniable. In 2013-2014 roughly 97% of all teachers in Maryland were rated as effective or highly effective and no equity gaps were noted in unqualified teachers when the state compared minority vs. non-minority quartiles. However, data clearly showed that new teachers were more likely to work in high-poverty and high-minority schools. Maryland currently has 23 different initiatives in place to ensure educator equity for all students. One of which, appears to directly influence access to excellent teachers.

The District of Columbia, notably, introduces their lack of data and describes a unique set of circumstances. District of Columbia Public Schools is 90% black and largely free and reduced lunch. The District therefore, does not compare high-minority to low-minority schools and defines high-poverty, not as schools that receive more than 75% free lunch as the other two states, but instead uses a unique descriptor, schools that have greater than 25% of students who meet one or more of the following requirements: pupil funding, homeless student, in DC foster care, qualifying for; temporary assistance for needy families, or supplemental nutrition assistance program or a high school student who is older than the typical enrollment age.

The problem with this distinction is that it makes poverty a much direr situation than the other states in the comparison. This means that any demonstrated gains attributed to strategies DC has put in place, again, cannot be readily compared because DCPS students are coming from a more disadvantage start. Moreover, no gains in the amount of highly qualified, highly effective, teachers within content area, or more experienced teachers is reported.

DCPS stated that the Office of the State Superintendent needed to continue to collect and analyze data. It should be noted, however, that DC had compelling root cause analysis conclusions. Many administrators and teachers in DCPS cited very specific working conditions as causes for attrition of highly qualified teachers in high-minority and high-poverty schools. DCPS acknowledged these conditions but has not created initiatives to deal directly with the cited issues. Instead, DCPS is standing behind IMPACT, an evaluation system that is inconclusive, at best, about producing the equity the initiative is intended to produce.

Policy Recommendations

The US Department of Education should require states to have very specific data collection assays and should require states and districts run very strict data analysis on the data collected. States should also be required to submit the results of that analysis to the US DOE.

It is irresponsible to allow each state to decide to what data can be collected and reported; and also then allow each state to report what they've planned to do to address inequities discovered by said data analysis when each state is collecting, reporting and analyzing differently.

While the objective of the DOE initiative was to allow states flexibility, it has proved counterproductive to allow too much flexibility. All three states critiqued in this study collected similar but not identical data. States were also allowed to define the inequities differently. The definition of who is a minority,