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Wildwood Public Schools

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RE: Minority Educator Pipeline Testimony Before the Joint Committee on the Public Schools

Members of the Assembly Education Committee,

My name is Kenyon Kummings and I am currently the Superintendent for Wildwood Public Schools (WPS). I am not going to pretend to be an expert on the topic of recruiting and retaining minority candidates, but our district has struggled to find candidates that understand the experience of our students. WPS has a high percentage of economically disadvantaged students and is racially and ethnically diverse. Our district is unique in that we continuously have one of the highest percentages of students living below the poverty line in New Jersey (50%). We have a high special education population (24%) as well as a large number of English Language Learners (35% through 8th Grade).

Recruiting qualified minority candidates has been a challenge for our district. Anecdotally, we can share that the pool to hire from is small. This testimony contains more questions than answers, but emphasizes the need for this issue to remain a priority of the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) and legislature. It will also offer examples of how we may improve the pipeline to allow more diversity within our public educator population.

Do we have a pipeline issue, more so than a recruitment issue?

The NJDOE references the “Pipeline” in their presentation, “Diversifying the Teacher Workforce” (https://www.state.nj.us/education/educators/rpr/Diversity%20Convening%20PPT%20Accessible_v2.pdf). Target points identified for the “Pipeline” include Postsecondary Enrollment, Enrollment in Education Programs, Postsecondary Completion, Entering the Workforce, and Retention. It is important to focus on the entry point to the pipeline and question if potential barriers exist to even qualifying as a candidate in an Educator Preparation Program (EPP).

Dr. Claudine Keenan, current president for New Jersey Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (NJACTE) shared that the Title 2 data from traditional route programs show trends that New Jersey overall saw a decline in the number of completers in EPP’s. This decline was observed in 2014 when the number declined from 5,027 in 2008-2009 to 3,819 in 2013-2014, and eventually fell to 3,281 in 2015-2016. It is worth noting that in 2012, the GPA requirement was raised to 3.00 (N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-8.2). During that time period, students were also required to pass all sections of the Praxis Core in addition to the Praxis II for their clinical internship. Further study is needed to determine the patterns within demographic subgroups. Could one or a combination of these changes have resulted in a barrier to certification for minority populations? Has this decrease been sustained with the introduction of the EdTPA requirement in 2017?

Do barriers to the pipeline exist prior to exiting high school?

Working as a district in the New Jersey Network of Superintendents (NJNS), the approach to creating equity is predominantly focused on opportunity and access for ALL students regarding Pre K to 12 programs. We often hear about the outcomes of leveled coursework beginning in elementary school. Finding

solutions to remove barriers for minority populations is a focus of the group, and we learn that these barriers exist throughout the state. Often times staff recommendations are required for students to enter higher level course work, and this potentially biased process often loses students who could handle and benefit from the increased challenge, because current systems do not always identify them due to the limitations of the entry measures used.

Schools also tend to heavily weight standardized test scores in this identification process. A great volume of research exists regarding the validity of these assessments, as well as the bias many of their items contain. There is also plenty of data to show the difference in performance trends when comparing demographic subgroups. These same trends can be witnessed when looking at Praxis Core data for reading, writing and math, as well as when SAT scores are compared by household income (scores increase with wealth). It should also be noted when discussing entry into the pipeline, that New Jersey is one of 12 states in the country that still ties a passing score on a standardized state assessment to graduation from high school.

What can we control?

Given the data we have, a deeper analysis of potential barriers for our students to enter an EPP is warranted. However, we can take some initial steps toward developing an action plan.

- Determine if the outcomes of tracking and leveling prior to high school graduation prevent students from attaining the education needed to gain entry into an EPP, and if so, address them.
- Determine if the high school graduation assessment requirement is an unnecessary barrier for students, and what is the demographic makeup of students utilizing the portfolio appeal?
- Determine if the change in GPA and the associated assessments required to gain certification (Praxis II, Praxis Core, and EdTPA) have negatively impacted completion of EPP's for minority students.
- Determine if there are barriers other than academic ones brought about by the increased number of assessments, including the high cost of these assessments and an increase in the length of student teaching time by which candidates are effectively kept from paid employment.
- Scale the work of groups such as NJNS to help districts give opportunity and access for students who are able to receive more challenging coursework through the development of unbiased, multi-faceted entry criteria and innovative, scaffolded, course delivery models.
- The NJDOE and the NJ Legislature can improve the pipeline by creating Career and Technical Education (CTE) opportunities within comprehensive high schools to identify and prepare students who have a passion for education in an effort to recruit students into the profession at the secondary level.
- Encourage the development of partnerships between Comprehensive High Schools and EPPs to allow for articulation of expectations for EPP entry and creation within high schools of systems of support to ensure that minority students have access to these programs upon high school graduation.

Several data sources exist to begin to address the questions mentioned throughout this document. Perhaps we need to create systems that will allow us to make a deeper analyses of our practices in New Jersey. The need to increase the representation of minority educators in NJ is well documented via data sources found within the NJDOE's Educator Preparation Provider Performance Reports (<https://eppdata.doe.state.nj.us/>). In addition to teacher preparation/certification, I would also emphasize the need to monitor the representation of minorities within educational leadership positions as well. In addition to looking at the status of our pipeline, we should also incorporate studies that exist regarding the experience of minority teachers. This would inform our practice as we strengthen recruitment and retention.

Sincerely,



J. Kenyon Kummings, Superintendent