

Testimony to the Achievement Gap Task Force

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Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Master Plan.

First, let me state our support for the comprehensive approach that the Task Force has taken to addressing the achievement gap. You have implicated several sectors which influence the quality of childhood in your policy recommendations in addition to schools and we applaud you on this approach.

I have brief comments to share regarding four areas addressed by the Task Force:

Early Care and Education: We support the provision of accredited, quality preschool for all low income children, indeed for all children.

- Teachers at all levels require professional development and opportunities to plan and problem solve student learning issues. There are provisions in your Plan to develop the skills of preschool teachers. In this regard, we would recommend that there be standards developed and adopted to ensure that preschool teachers are offered the supports that they require. The Standards of the National Association for the Education of Young Children are an excellent resource and should be considered for adoption by the Task Force as a framework for the continuing professionalization of preschool education programs .
- CAS is working with several partners including the CSDE to support six districts which are creating coherent pathways between preschool programs and public schools. We recommend that the Plan include a provision that would incentivize school districts and community-based preschools to create greater alignment in their approaches not only to literacy but to all aspects of program development and leadership. The *Framework for Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating Pre-K-3rd Grade Approaches* is the tool that we are currently using and which we recommend to you.

English Language Learners: We support all plans to address the shortage of qualified Bi-lingual and TESOL teachers.

- In February, CAS convened a group of thirty urban educators in a meeting with members of the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus to discuss the achievement gap. These administrators expressed their need for highly qualified Bilingual and TESOL teachers. The shortage is at a critical level. The lack of bi-lingual teachers poses additional challenges to schools in addition to the instructional issues. The task of engaging parents in the education process is compounded by the language gap which exists between so many of the teachers in high need schools. Addressing this problem should remain among the priority recommendations of the Task Force.

Leadership Preparation and Development:

- All principals in training need to learn both theory and practice and have the two elements integrated. Internship experiences are critical to the preparation of administrators who are ready to lead when they enter the principalship. The more in-depth the experience, the better prepared the individual. We recommend that you develop a policy with a high standard for this component of preparation programs. Consider the requirements of the most successful programs, such as the Urban Education Leadership Program at the University of Illinois.
- Principals at all levels of experience, but especially those new to the profession, require on-going support. We support programs that provide opportunities for problem solving school issues through mechanisms such as communities of practice, seminar series and coaching relationships.
- Principals are hard pressed to find time to conduct the leadership activities that drive instructional improvement and student learning. In one study conducted by Stanford and Vanderbilt Universities, researchers found that principals spent an average of 12.7% of their time on a variety of instruction-related tasks. Instructionally focused Assistant Principals may help solve some of the problem of time; however, principals require some relief in the management tasks that draw them away from their leadership responsibilities. We recommend that you draft a policy recommendation which address this challenge directly.

Time as Resource:

- Your recommendations at this time do not account for the movement towards mastery based learning, whereby the learning outcomes are the constant and the time required to meet the expectations are the variable. We recommend that the Task Force take reconfigure its recommendations to account for master-based learning concepts.