



Education Redesign: Building a New Model

Section 2: Education Reform Landscape

Video 2: Gaps Remain

PAUL REVILLE: Our intentions and our approach in education reform in the US and here in Massachusetts really reflected a felicitous coincidence between our moral and ethical obligation to do for all children what heretofore we've only been able to do for an elite few, an obligation that civil rights leaders and their religious leaders have reminded us from time immemorial to serve the next generation at least as well as we have been served by our parents and the adults in the previous generation. That obligation coincides with our obligation now in our current economy what becomes a self interest to educate all of our students to a high level so that they can participate in our economy in a way that will enable us to grow the economy, to grow jobs, and to ensure their own future as well as society's future, to keep the economy going, to keep the democracy going, to keep our nation moving forward. So what was morally obligatory for us but we'd ignored for a long time, now becomes in our economic self-interest to do. And so we're moving forward on that with a sense of urgency.

We have been over the past 20, 25 years, and we can be proud of that in all of our states. We've had widespread continuous change. We've focused both on standards-- for the first time in our profession, setting high, clear standards of what children should know and be able to do for everyone-- and holding parties accountable for their participation, creating real choice within public education systems, charter schools, and

vouchers experiments in some places, but giving parents more choice, having reform proceed at federal, state, and local levels.

And yet, the message I'm going to be focused on today, the finding that I'm going to be focused on, is that the results are in. After 2 to 2 and 1/2 decades of reform in our states and the gaps persist, notwithstanding the kind of performance that we're so proud of here in Massachusetts. I'm going to show you a few illustrations of this. I'm not going to spend a lot of time on these tables because they all basically bring forward the same message, but they do so from different angles.

Here, for example, in the nation's top performing state, is how we fare on our own MCAS tests with students in English and students in mathematics. And you see the differences between various subgroups here-- African-America in the green line, blue line being Hispanic students, and the white line being white students. So you see thought the levels of performance have come up over time, and we're very proud of that, the gaps persist.

Here's another illustration, and it talks about students by the time they're in fourth grade and where they are relative to proficiency in reading. If your family income is low, almost 3/4, in some cases more than 3/4 of students, are not achieving proficiency in reading. And if you're from a more affluent family, the rates are still too high, but significantly lower than what would happen if you were in a low income family.

This becomes doubly important than it already is when we look at the changes that are going on in our nation as a population. For the first time, less than half of public school students are white in the US public schools. And on top of that, the income background

is changing. 51% of our children qualify for free and reduced lunch, meaning they're coming from low income backgrounds.

So students that we have historically considered in the minority, and we've sometimes been so complacent as to ignore their needs, have now become the majority, and it becomes that much more imperative that we have an education system that speaks to these children and gives them what they need to be successful. And the differences start very early in life. So here is a chart that illustrates early gaps in just the words heard by children.

In the preschool years, there's a 30 million word difference in the words heard by children from welfare families and those from working class and professional families by age three. And of course, those students carry those gaps into kindergarten with them. So we have a wide span of literacy readiness at the beginning of kindergarten, and those relative advantages and disadvantages persists throughout the 13 years in the k-12 education system.

Someone could easily make the argument here that the race to success for all is over before it even begins because of the comparative advantage in disadvantage that people experience early in life. Here are some figures that go to fourth grade and look at reading scores and math scores broken down by particular subgroups. You see the same pattern here. I draw your attention to the difference between higher income students, 51% of proficiency in reading at fourth grade, and only 18% for those who qualify for free lunch.

Likewise, in math, higher income students a 59%, lower income students at 24%. So the differences show up early and the differences are deep. Same figures now taken at eighth grade. And those gaps persist.

If we look at high school graduation rates, we'll see big differences there. Look at the difference between white students and black students-- a difference of 17 percentage points. And if we had college graduation figures, the results would be even more different.

And as a result, opportunities narrow. Here you see some college income figures-- college completion figures-- and see the dramatic difference in the far right-hand column between college completion rates for low income versus high income students. And when we set out to do education reform, we set out to make your zip code, your family background irrelevant. But we've not succeeded at that.

It is still the case that your socioeconomic status at birth, your background, is the best predictor of your educational achievement and attainment. We hope to create a world in which demographics would not be destiny, and they aren't for any individual person. But looked at overall, the data suggests demographics are still destiny within the US public education system.

So we haven't gotten to the goal of "all means all" despite our best intentions, some strong policies that were necessary-- but I would argue insufficient-- despite some major investments, and a lot of hard work by educational leaders and teachers and students in the field. Substantial gaps persist in achievement among different subgroups on many different measures. And these differences add up and they make a big difference in

terms of not only the level of educational attainment, but people's employment and ultimately their earnings, as you can see illustrated here.

The relevance of education to being able to earn a decent income in this society is steadily increasing. And it makes this business of designing an effective education system that achieves "all means all" urgently important for all of us.