

Over half of minority teacher applicants fail

BOSTON (AP) - More than half of Black and Hispanic applicants for teaching jobs in Massachusetts have failed a crucial state licensing test.

Since the start of the test nearly a decade ago, 52 percent of Hispanics and 54 percent of Blacks failed the writing portion of the test compared to a 23 percent failure rate among White applicants.

Blacks and Hispanics also fall behind White applicants in other test subjects like

English, history and math.

Education officials say the gap is making it harder to bring more diversity to the state's teaching ranks.

Chris Anderson, chairman of the state Board of Education, said he's willing to consider other ways of assessing teachers, as long as standards remain high.

"There's no reason to have any barriers to quality teachers if we don't need them," Anderson told *The Boston Sunday Globe*.

"At the same time, we need to have accountability and assurance that there are basic abilities for any new teacher in Massachusetts."

The problem is so persistent that a special state task force of teachers, state education officials and hiring directors has been set up to find out why minorities don't do better on the tests.

Sally Diaz, a vice president at Emmanuel College in Boston and a member of the panel, said one test shouldn't

make or break a career.

"One of the fallouts which is particularly upsetting in our experience across the colleges is fewer and fewer students of color are even going into teaching because word has gotten out that these tests are very difficult for them," she said.

Adding to the worries are stricter federal rules focused on improving teacher quality.

Under the 2001 federal law, states must prove their teachers have met a compe-

tency bar set by the state. Massachusetts school districts risk losing federal funding if they aren't making progress toward licensing all their teachers.

Some deans of education schools are raising questions about whether the lower results among minority applicants shows the tests are culturally biased and whether the quality of education that minority applicants receive is good enough.

Some minority applicants

say the tests include questions that White applicants and those with liberal arts backgrounds can more readily identify with, such as questions about ancient literature or investing in the stock market.

A Cambridge lawyer said he's planning to file a class action lawsuit against the state Department of Education and the testing company on behalf of three minority teachers who failed the test multiple times.

Examining racism sparks Tupelo riff

TUPELO, Miss. (AP) - A study commissioned by the city of Tupelo to determine if racial bias existed in the city's hiring and firing practices seems to have become a full-blown ethics investigation by the hired consultant.

The mayor calls the expanded study a "witch hunt."

Cindy Brown, a consultant with EthicsNow, claims to have heard reports of not only racial discrimination, but gender discrimination and cronyism, according to an article in the *Northeast Mississippi Daily Journal* newspaper.

The study was commissioned in October because of a case involving former Deputy Police Chief Robert Hall. He was demoted for freeing a drunk driver who hit a child and later pleaded guilty to charges connected to the case.

However, before Hall pleaded guilty, members of the Black community protested the Tupelo Police Department's decision to demote Hall, who is Black. They claimed it was racially biased.

To soothe the discord, the city council created a Race Relations Committee of four council members, and revived a dormant Multi-Racial Committee composed of residents of different colors and backgrounds.

In the last 10 months, the study of hiring practices degenerated into a mudslinging contest that pits Mayor Ed Neelly's administration against Brown and members of both the city council and the Multi-Racial Committee.

The residents of Tupelo are caught in the middle and could end up paying more than \$100,000 for the ever-expanding study, the paper reported.

Neelly and his administration blame the study consultant for missteps, half-truths, unprofessional conduct and

bias.

City attorney Guy Mitchell asked, "Why does the person doing an assessment want to create doubt and suspicion rather than do the assessment she was hired to do?"

The consultant and her supporters blame the administration for stonewalling and withholding information.

"It is not my intention to incite anyone," said Brown. "I want to do the best job I can to find out what the real situation is in order to make the city the best it can be and not create division, but to bring the city together."

Observers say several factors led to the rift between the two camps.

—The Race Relations Committee was charged with picking a consultant, but the group chose the first one suggested with little or no reference checks.

—National Institute of Ethics director Neal Trautman, the original consultant hired, passed the study off to his partner with little communication that he was doing so.

—The administration makes no secret it dislikes Brown. And Brown has made few friends among department heads who say publicly and privately that she's been less than honest.

—Brown says she received several claims of fiscal misappropriation and reports that the Public Works Department is run not by its director, John Pittman, but by Chief Operations Officer Darrell Smith, according to the paper.

The council recently authorized an expanded study, something the mayor refers to as a "witch hunt," and nearly doubled the contract price. But it also failed to set a deadline, prompting some to wonder when the study will end just how much it will cost before it's over.

The first day of school is August 27, 2007.

Are You Ready?

Notebooks

Backpack

Pencils

Lunch box

IMMUNIZATIONS

Extended hours for back-to-school immunizations will be offered at the Southern Nevada Health District, 625 Shadow Lane:

- Saturday, August 4, 11, 18 and 25 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.* Sports physicals and Healthy Kids exams will be available at the Saturday clinics. Call 759-0896 for details or to make an appointment.
- Monday-Friday, August 20-24 and August 27-31 from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.*

The above services are available at other health district locations, Monday-Friday from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Call or visit the website for locations.

Administrative fees range from \$16-\$20. Some vaccines may require an additional fee. Please bring shot records and Medicaid or Nevada CheckUp card, if applicable.

Children younger than 18 must have a parent or guardian with them. A non-custodial adult may come with the child if written permission from the parent or guardian is presented at the time of service.

*No other health district services will be available after 4:30 p.m. or on Saturday.



For more information, call 759-0850
or visit www.SouthernNevadaHealthDistrict.org