

New York to Nix Literacy Tests for Teachers because too many Minorities Are Failing

Should teachers be able to pass a basic literacy test before they set foot in a classroom?

One would think that the answer to that question would be a solid yes. After all, it seems obvious that the ability to understand and communicate through reading and writing is essential to any teacher regardless of the subject in which he teaches.

New York once agreed with this common sense approach, as evidenced by the requirement for teachers to pass the [Academic Literacy Skills Test](#). The exam, labeled “a 12th grade-level assessment” by education expert Ian Rosenblum, consisted of multiple choice and written form literacy questions. But it is about to be history for one simple reason: it stifles diversity. According to the [Associated Press](#):

“[T]he literacy test raised alarms from the beginning because just 46 percent of Hispanic test takers and 41 percent of black test takers passed it on the first try, compared with 64 percent of white candidates.

A federal judge ruled in 2015 that the test was not discriminatory, but faculty members at education schools say a test that screens out so many minorities is problematic.

‘Having a white workforce really doesn’t match our student body anymore,’ [Pace University education professor Leslie] Soodak said.”

Today, only [37 percent](#) of the nation's high school seniors are proficient in reading. That number drops to [27 percent](#) when it comes to writing. When one digs into the data behind these scores, it soon becomes apparent that minority students [struggle](#) to attain proficiency more than others.

It's certainly a praiseworthy goal to get more minority teachers into the classroom as role models for young children. But at the same time we should ask ourselves: Is a teacher really being a good role model if he is exhibiting poor literacy skills to the children who are watching him?

If we're really serious about breaking the cycle of continued low performance, then shouldn't we be most concerned with putting knowledgeable teachers in a classroom, and less concerned about whether or not schools measure up on the diversity threshold?

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