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## ABSTRACT

This monograph discusses the situation confronting education policymakers regarding growing student diversity. Many education policymakers are frustrated by the persistent achievement gap between white and nonwhite students, which is as wide or wider when it comes to top-performing students. Students are experiencing racial intolerance at school. When school systems are intolerant of diversity and neglect to take important steps, they help maintain the achievement gap. Disproportionate numbers of minority students are placed in special education and other lower-track programs, and they get a lower-level curriculum that does not present a complete picture of diverse contributions to society. Students of color tend to have less-qualified teachers, and their schools do not address diverse learning styles or encourage students to engage in cultural inquiry based on shared values. A culturally competent education system should help students and staff interact constructively with diverse individuals; help students develop knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to achieve high standards; and foster renewed focus on ideas that bind all Americans. Culturally competent schools should use high-quality academic standards, adopt a curriculum that fosters cultural competency, and acknowledge students' diverse learning styles. An afterword offers "Promoting Unity in a Diverse Society" (Brenda Welburn). (SM)

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# A MORE PERFECT UNION: Building an Education System that Embraces All Children

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# A MORE PERFECT UNION

*Building an Education System  
that Embraces All Children*

2001

**NASBE**  
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF  
STATE BOARDS OF EDUCATION

The Report of the NASBE Study Group  
on the Changing Face of America's School Children

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# Table of Contents

	Foreword .....	4
	<i>After September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001</i>	
	Executive Summary.....	6
1	Background: Diversity in America's Schools .....	10
2	Behind the Data: How Schools Inadvertently Perpetuate Inequity and Intolerance .....	19
3	What Can the Education System Do? .....	28
	Afterword .....	44
	<i>Promoting Unity in a Diverse Society, by Brenda Welburn, NASBE Executive Director</i>	
	References .....	46

## Foreword

# After September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001

While diversity in the United States has increased exponentially over the last decade, as this report will show, diversity is not in itself a new national phenomenon. For many years, demographers and educators have been alerting the country to the shift in racial and ethnic identity among public school students, and they have been urging policymakers to re-invent and better equip our education system to seize the opportunities and overcome the challenges presented by this population shift. One of the early voices to carry this message was NASBE's landmark 1991 report, *An American Tapestry: Educating A Nation*.<sup>1</sup>

Issued by the NASBE Study Group on Multicultural Education, *An American Tapestry* was intended to help education leaders expand their comprehension of how race, culture, language, gender, and socio-economics impacted schools and learning. The Study Group members

called upon education leaders to proactively develop policies and programs that ensured broad cultural, racial, and gender representation at all levels of the education community and school life; infused multicultural perspectives and experiences through the curriculum; prepared teachers and other school personnel for working with students from diverse cultural backgrounds; and created a school environment that honored and respected diversity.

Expanding upon the positions expressed a decade ago in *An American Tapestry*, NASBE's Study Group on the Changing Face of America's School Children spent the first eight months of 2001 examining and deliberating on the complex issues involved in diversity, culture, and preparing students intellectually and socially for the United States—indeed, the world—of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Then on September 11<sup>th</sup>, that country and

the world changed forever. In the aftermath of the attacks, this nation and hundreds of millions of people around the globe demonstrated an uncommon unity of grief, sympathy, faith, and renewed dedication to the best aspects of what it means to be human. At the same time, some of the worst aspects of humanity also surfaced: in this country through mindless attacks on the people and property of Americans of Middle Eastern descent and the harassment of Middle Eastern students at schools and universities, and around the world in various demonstrations of support for Osama bin Laden and through the idea that Americans had somehow gotten what they deserved. In response, on September 17<sup>th</sup> President George W. Bush went to the mosque at the Islamic Center of Washington to speak against such racist attacks here: "Those who feel like they can intimidate our fellow citizens to take out their anger don't represent the best of

America; they represent the worst of humankind,” he said. And Islamic clerics and leaders everywhere condemned the terrorist attacks and admonished those who would celebrate the killing.

It is in these circumstances, with the wide range of humanity so obviously on display for adults and young people alike, that the Study Group dedicates this report to those who lost their lives or who lost loved ones on September 11<sup>th</sup>, as well as to

those who, in the coming months and years, will suffer from other attacks or through the war that events have compelled us to wage. If there is a silver lining to the cloud of dust and destruction that the terrorist attacks have brought us, it is that underlying our differences a stronger sense of unified purpose, democratic values, and common goals has now been revealed. It is important for the nation—and educators in particular—to build on this unity. To this end, the Study

Group rededicates itself to the work of ensuring that students of every background and circumstance have a chance to succeed academically, of building students’ understanding and tolerance of the many cultures that make up the American family, and of building an understanding of the American culture’s impact on the rest of the world. It is the Study Group’s belief that through such hard work and understanding lies the path to harmony, prosperity, and dignity for all.

# Executive Summary

The 2000 Census has documented what people in many communities—and teachers in particular—have known for some time: that the United States is, in many respects, a nation drawn together by differences and that our demographic diversity is expanding rapidly. Among school-age children today, about 65 percent are non-Hispanic white, while 35 percent are from other racial and ethnic backgrounds. Further, estimates are that by 2040 no ethnic or racial group will make up a majority of the national school-age population.

Nor does the growth in these larger population groups tell the whole story, because even within groups there are many differences that affect public schools. In many districts, there are dozens of different languages counted as the “home” language of students. And complicating matters for educators is the reality that many of the

issues arising from diversity lie outside the “official” arena of the education system: for example, the fact that many students of diverse cultures come from families in poverty, do not speak English well, have parents who are not well-educated, and move and change schools frequently. Yet NASBE’s Study Group on the Changing Face of America’s School Children was firm in its resolve that despite such complications, the nation’s public education system cannot shy away from its responsibility to welcome all children and ensure that every student has a real opportunity to achieve to high standards, has acquired the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to thrive in our diverse nation, and understands and has internalized those fundamental values that Americans have in common.

Following is a summary of the “given”—that is, the situation now confronting education policymakers.

## ***The Demographics of Diversity***

As outlined above, the impact of growing diversity is especially significant for schools. In fact, roughly one-fifth of the school-age population, or 9.8 million children, speak a language other than English at home. Whether the source of increased diversity is from immigration (such as Somalis in Minneapolis, Central Americans in northern Virginia, or Hmong in Fresno), or from higher birth rates among families of color, or simply the movement of people among cities, towns, and states, the impact of diversity is being felt in school communities across the country.

## ***Data about the Achievement Gap***

For many education policymakers, one of the most frustrating failures of public schools—and a stark reminder that we have yet to successfully deal with diversity—is the persistent gap in achievement

levels between white students and students of color. This gap in achievement is seen on nearly all wide-scale assessments, from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), to state tests, to those used by larger districts. For states, the gap persists even when students adjust to and improve overall on new statewide assessments.

Even more serious is the fact that the achievement gap appears to be as wide or even wider when it comes to top-performing students. For example, on NAEP's most recent math assessment, while 20 percent of white 12<sup>th</sup>-graders scored high enough to be proficient or advanced, only 3 percent of African Americans and 4 percent of Hispanics scored in this range. In a society that is becoming increasingly diverse, such disparities point alarmingly to a future in which people of color remain in an economic underclass and remain underrepresented in leadership positions in business, politics, and communities because of poor academic skills. At the same time, such persistent achievement gaps tend to foster attitudes of low expectations for certain groups, both among the students of those groups and the school staff who teach them. Low achievement thus becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy of continued low achievement and stereotypes in the future. The Study Group believes that the nation cannot afford to leave great numbers of individuals—indeed, whole groups of people—behind. To do so would be as unwise as it would be inequitable and unjust.

### ***Evidence of Intolerance***

More than 10,000 incidents of hate crime are reported each year, and many of the perpetrators and victims are teenagers and young

adults. Schools are often targeted for recruitment efforts by hate groups, and school officials in such widespread communities as Fairbanks, Alaska, Suffolk County, New York, and Tucson, Arizona have been forced to call in federal or local law enforcement officers to help handle hate crime incidents. The September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks have created a special urgency for dealing with hate crime and harassment before they get started. Many schools have moved quickly to beef up programs and curricula that help foster tolerance, but incidents involving harassment of Muslims and Arab Americans are still occurring. In September, Secretary of Education Rod Paige sent school officials nationwide a letter noting his concerns about “harassment and violence directed at persons perceived to be Arab Americans or of Middle Eastern or South Asian origin, including children.”<sup>2</sup>

Yet “intolerance” has an institutional meaning as well. This is when the school system itself is “intolerant” of the many cultures and learning styles that children bring to school—when schools in their parent involvement programs fail to welcome individuals of color into schools, neglect the fact that knowledge and skills among students of color and immigrant students may need to be evaluated in unconventional ways, and, perhaps most destructively, demonstrate implicit acceptance of the idea that not all students can or will learn to high standards. Such institutional intolerance works to maintain rather than diminish the achievement gap, and as such diminishes the free, open, and pluralistic society that is the foundation of our country.

## Behind the Numbers

Despite the numbers, the Study Group believes that diversity itself is not a problem to be solved, but a natural phenomenon of a pluralistic society that presents the nation with both opportunities and challenges. Clearly, many of the challenges and problems associated with diversity are not directly connected to schools. But the Study Group found that even while the causes of the achievement gap and intolerance are exceedingly complex and in many ways bound up in broad social forces, what happens within the education system—at all levels—is also a major contributor. For example:

- ***Disproportionate numbers of students of color are placed in special education and other lower-track programs.*** Students from diverse cultures are often segregated socially and academically by placement in any number of second-system programs initiated to respond to diverse student needs (such as English as a Second Language, Title I, and special education). For example, African American children are almost three times more likely than white children to be labeled “mentally retarded.” Once assigned to pull-out programs or special classes, substantial evidence shows the students receive inferior instruction and continue to fall further behind their peers.
- ***Students of color get a lower-level curriculum.*** This is true even apart from the “placement” problem noted above, and can be seen in the data showing that culturally

diverse students are significantly less likely than white students to be in gifted and talented programs, in higher-level math classes, or in Advanced Placement courses. It has also been witnessed by countless researchers and school improvement specialists who visit schools with high proportions of students of color and tell of the sometimes appallingly low curricula and expectations they have found in classes there.

- ***Students of color tend to have less-qualified teachers.*** Numerous studies at the national, state, and local levels have found that students in urban areas, students of color, and students from lower-income families are much more likely to have teachers with less experience, who are teaching outside their field of certification, who have emergency certification, or who have failed certification exams.
- ***Most students do not get a full curriculum that presents a complete picture of diverse contributions to the American way of life.*** Our schools have historically not been good at including in our curricula information about other cultures and the varied historical, scientific, and social contributions of Americans of diverse backgrounds. At the same time, earlier multicultural curricula have sometimes erred in tending to divide people by stressing differences over commonalities,

fostering “cultural relativism” or the idea that any given cultural practice is as good as another, or merely mentioning the achievements of various individuals from diverse cultures without placing these achievements or cultures in a historical or social context.

- ***Diverse learning styles are not addressed in many schools.*** Consensus is emerging that not everyone learns in the same way; that a student’s particular style of learning, if accommodated, can result in improved attitudes toward learning and increased productivity, academic achievement, and creativity; and that some elements of learning style are affected by cultural values and practices. While progress is being made, too many schools today, with traditional organizational structures and the limits of standard teaching practices, are unprepared to meet an inherently diverse and changing set of students’ needs.
- ***Schools do not encourage students to engage in cultural inquiry based on shared values.*** Today, little attention is given—even within some multicultural curricula—to helping students gain the knowledge and skills needed to examine, develop an understanding of, and interact with different cultures; to place their own culture within a world context; and to appreciate the common set of democratic values that underlie the American culture.

## What Can the Education System Do?

In order to foster true democratic opportunity and participation, the Study Group believes that practitioners and policymakers need to develop a *culturally competent* education system that helps all students and school staff interact constructively with individuals from diverse backgrounds; helps students develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they need to achieve to high standards; and fosters a renewed focus on the ideals that bind rather than divide all Americans. In broad terms, a culturally competent system addresses persistent underachievement, stereotyping, and intolerance by focusing on three related aims: 1) culturally competent schools encourage individuals to understand differences among groups of people; 2) culturally competent schools foster high standards; and 3) culturally competent schools strengthen national ideals.

The good news is that there are individual schools and school districts that largely succeed in developing a truly culturally competent education system, one in which all children are welcomed, are encouraged to succeed, and—most important—do succeed in achieving to higher levels. In addition to focusing on the three aims noted above, a culturally competent system:

- ***Uses high-quality academic standards as the basis of instruction for all students.*** Standards have been the linchpin of state education reform efforts for

nearly a decade, and efforts to improve standards—and ensure that all teachers and schools are fully able to help students meet the standards—must be maintained. Only through the over-arching system of standards and standards-based accountability can policymakers, educators, and parents be sure that no groups of students are being left behind in the back rooms of education.

- ***Adopts a curriculum that fosters cultural competency.*** Given the multitude of cultures in the world, it is impractical to teach about all of them. But it is important to use what we know about effective instruction and high-level curriculum to inculcate interpersonal skills, cultural self-awareness, and knowledge of inter-ethnic dynamics. Research indicates that there are a number of attributes of effective curriculum that achieves both increased academic proficiency as well as an increase in positive attitudes toward other racial/ethnic groups. Such a curriculum has three parts: 1) knowledge of cultures, their similarities, and their differences; 2) skills to understand, analyze, and critique familiar and unfamiliar cultures; and 3) shared values that form the basis for cultural analysis and tolerance.
- ***Demonstrates respect for students' identities and welcomes a diverse community to participate in schools.*** Evidence is

mounting that school environment matters, and affirming the value of each student's identity in school fosters positive academic and personal development. In addition to affirming the value of each student's culture, schools need to make parents and other family members welcome in school and encourage community groups to become involved in school activities.

- ***Acknowledges students' diverse learning styles.*** While no student should ever be ascribed a learning style based solely on their race or ethnicity, culturally competent schooling requires teachers to take into account culturally specific childhood socialization practices that foster the development of particular learning styles and attitudes toward school among students.
- ***Ensures qualified personnel for all students.*** The effort to place qualified teachers and administrators in all schools will not succeed with a scattershot approach that relies on signing bonuses. It can be done, but it will take comprehensive efforts by states using strategies that include rigorous licensure standards, rigorous standards for training institutions, induction programs, effective professional development, and sustained efforts for recruitment and retention.
- ***Provides extra help for schools and students who***

***need it.*** Clearly, expecting higher levels of achievement for all students will not be successful if students and schools that are having trouble reaching the new standards do not receive the help they need. State board members have made this issue a priority for a number of years—yet the complexities and challenges of ensuring that this help exists for every student, classroom, school, and district are daunting. Fortunately, a number of states, through their accountability systems, have moved ahead systematically to fulfill their promise of providing assistance.

## **Unity, Achievement, and Diversity**

The challenge for policymakers now is to educate a very diverse population to high standards and promote a sense of national unity while at the same time instilling an understanding of other cultures and their contributions to our society. This is truly today's version of the American dream of pluralism, the American promise of equal opportunity for all, and the American strength of *e pluribus unum*. While the details of the dream change as the sweep of events cause our nation to change and grow, the country's fundamental values as expressed in our Constitution remain unshaken. No other institution has a more critical role to play than the public school system in ensuring that this dream for a more perfect union remains viable in the minds and hearts of future generations.

## Chapter 1

# Background: Diversity in America's Schools

The United States is, in many respects, a nation drawn together by differences. The 2000 Census has documented a dramatic diversification of U.S. residents, particularly in our school-age population. But while diversity in the United States has increased exponentially over the last decade, diversity is not in itself a new national phenomenon. For many years, demographers and educators have been alerting the country to the shift in racial and ethnic identity among public school students, and they have been urging policymakers to re-invent and better equip our education system to seize the opportunities and overcome the challenges presented by this population shift. One of the early voices to carry this message was NASBE's 1991 landmark report, *An American Tapestry: Educating A Nation*.

The Study Group on the Changing Face of America's School Children believes that while progress has been

made since the publication of *An American Tapestry*, much remains to be done. Curricular materials continue to provide inaccurate or overly simplistic portrayals of the contributions of different racial, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groups to United States' history. Teachers continue to be ill-prepared to deliver a curriculum that emphasizes the contributions of all people to the U.S. and to the world. At the same time, earlier multicultural curricula have sometimes erred in tending to divide people by stressing differences over commonalities, fostering "cultural relativism" or the idea that any given cultural practice is as good as another, or merely mentioning the achievements of various individuals from diverse cultures without placing these achievements or cultures in a historical or social context. Meanwhile, U.S. students continue to lag behind many other students of the world in terms of fluency in a foreign language,

understanding of world history, and knowledge of geography. Students continue to be both victims and perpetrators of demonstrations of intolerance such as harassment, graffiti, and violence. Worst of all, achievement measures remain lowest and dropout rates continue to be highest among students of color. Clearly, the work ahead is considerable and of monumental importance in a country that believes that everyone deserves the resources and opportunity to rise to his or her potential.

The demographic evidence combined with statistics concerning student achievement and racial intolerance paint a picture of a nation that is rapidly growing more diverse, particularly among school-age youth, without growing measurably more able to handle diversity in constructive ways. In sum, the Study Group found our school system unprepared to meet the challenges that increased diversity among students implies.

## The Data

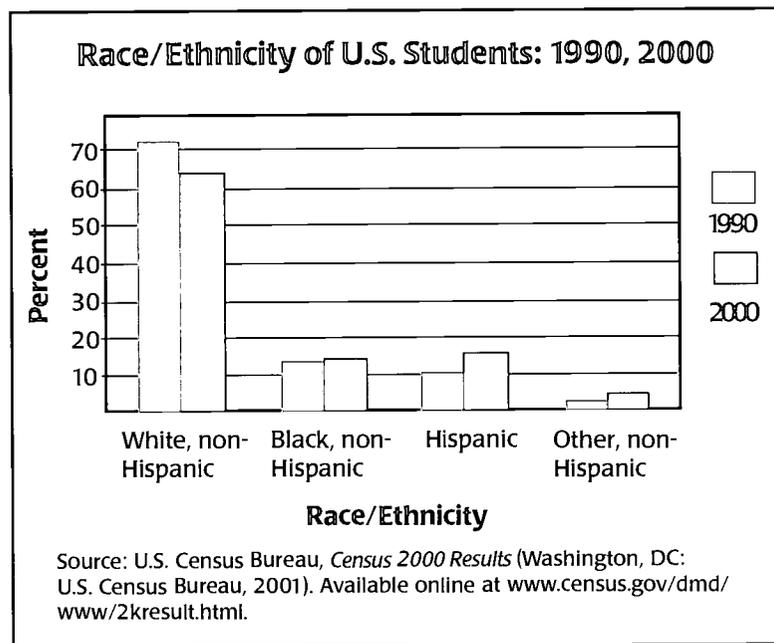
### Demographics

The results of the 2000 Census confirm what *An American Tapestry* laid out years ago: the United States is a diverse nation that grows more diverse annually (see chart at right). According to the Census, about 75 percent of the entire U.S. population is non-Hispanic white and 25 percent are either Black, Hispanic/Latino, American Indian, Asian/Pacific Islander, or of more than one race. Among school-age children, however, about 65 percent are non-Hispanic white and 35 percent are from other racial and ethnic backgrounds. Estimates are that by 2040 no ethnic or racial group will make up a majority of the national school-age population.

Many schools have contended for decades with the challenges and opportunities that this pluralism affords, most notably in our nation's most diverse states—California, New York, New Jersey, Texas, and Florida. In future years these states will be joined by many others that will be significantly affected by diversity: by 2015, fewer than 10 states will have 20 percent or less of their students from communities of color.

Not only are schools becoming more diverse, but schools with diverse populations are more likely to struggle with the consequences of

poverty as well. While thirty-nine percent of all American children live at or near the national poverty line (earning \$26,580 or less for a family of three), Latino children are more than three times as likely than white children to live in poverty, and Black children are almost four times as likely.<sup>3</sup> Living in poverty can affect children's school experiences and academic success in many ways:



children in poverty are more likely to struggle with the effects of inadequate nutrition, maternal substance abuse, maternal depression, and exposure to environmental toxins such as lead (whereas one American child in six has toxic levels of lead in his or her blood, 55 percent of African American children living in poverty have toxic levels of lead in their blood—an important cause of mental retardation).<sup>4</sup>

In addition to an increase in racial and ethnic diversity, the United States has grown linguistically more diverse, in part as a result of the

more than 13 million immigrants who arrived in the United States from across the globe during the 1990s. Currently, almost one-fifth of America's school-age children, or 9.8 million, speak a language other than English at home. In New Jersey, for example, as many as 140 languages are spoken by children in school. New immigrants, however, are much more likely than their

predecessors to live outside of the traditional enclaves of new arrivals in urban centers and border states. Consequently, issues associated with serving non-English speakers are spreading rapidly into areas that have until now felt comparatively few effects of immigration.

Schools that serve growing numbers of children of new immigrants also

often find themselves facing issues related to children in poverty; about one in four children living in poverty now lives in an immigrant household.<sup>5</sup>

The picture in many individual schools and districts makes the situation even more complex than the national picture implies. While the nation grows more diverse, pockets within the country continue to serve students who come almost exclusively from one racial or ethnic group. For example, some schools have long served students who come disproportionately from communities of color: in

Los Angeles, only ten percent of students in public schools are white non-Hispanic, and in Washington, DC, several schools serve an entirely African American student population. Indeed, while diversity among students is increasing nationally, the exposure of students of color to white students (measured by the average percentage of white students in schools attended by the average student of color) actually *decreased* from 1988 to 1997.<sup>6</sup> In other words, while the school-aged population is becoming more diverse nationally, individual schools are becoming less diverse, with students of color attending schools that comparatively few white non-Hispanic students attend.

Striking as the demographic data on school diversity may be, the **Study Group believes that diversity *per se* is not the problem facing our nation's schools. On the contrary, diversity is a naturally occurring phenomenon—and opportunity for growth—in any pluralist democracy. The problem rests in the inability of schools to build a system that educates all students to high standards and fosters the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that students and educators need to function in our diverse national and global society.**

### ***Achievement Gap***

For many education policymakers, one of the most frustrating failures of public schools is the persistent gap in achievement levels between white students and students of color. While there have been

are beyond the control of educators. Indeed, given the web of societal influences and causes, some despair that the gap can ever be narrowed through the actions of policymakers. The Study Group is firm in its belief, however, that just as social factors such as poverty, unsafe neighborhoods, and lack of parental involvement tug at the negative side of the gap, schools can and must make a significant difference on the positive side. There is no doubt, in other words, that schools can narrow the achievement gap. Period.

The uncomfortable reality is that the achievement gap between whites and African Americans and between whites and Latinos, which had narrowed during the 1970s and '80s, has stagnated or widened through the 1990s. The gap is seen in results from numerous state and district assessments, and has been tracked for decades by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the federal government's nationally representative assessment of American students' knowledge and skills in key subject areas, especially

reading and math. The tables at right show scores for four racial/ethnic groups in 4<sup>th</sup>-grade reading and 12<sup>th</sup>-grade mathematics.\* The gaps in scores are both significant and

### **Terminology**

Many terms have been used over the last several decades to describe as a group Americans whose ethnic, racial, or cultural background is non-European. These terms include "minorities," "people of color," and "people of diverse cultures," to mention a few of the most prominent. Yet all of these terms have their own limitations and confusions, even though most people have a common understanding of their meaning. In order to stress the idea of diversity that is at the core of this report, the Study Group has chosen to use a variety of terms that, it believes, revolve around a common definition. The one exception is that *A More Perfect Union* does not use the term "minority," since one of the report's key points is that we are rapidly approaching the time when there will be no racial/ethnic majority.

"It's not that issues like poverty and parental education don't matter. Clearly they do. But we take the students who have less to begin with and then systematically give them less in school. In fact, we give these students less of everything that we believe makes a difference. We do this in hundreds of different ways."

—Kati Haycock<sup>7</sup>

pockets of success, closing the gap has proved to be an extremely complex problem that requires long-term, consistent efforts on a number of fronts, some of which

\* Numbers for Asian American students are more complicated. Scores for students from Japan and Korea are generally equal to or higher than scores for white students. Scores for students from Vietnam, Laos, and the Philippines are generally lower.

persistent, with gaps on the reading test between 4<sup>th</sup>-grade whites and the other groups ranging from 18 to 33 points on a scale where the national average was around 215. The real significance of this can be seen when looking at the scores in terms of the grading scale: it takes a score of 208 to reach the “Basic” level, and a score of 238 to reach “Proficient.” While most would not be satisfied with the average white score of 227, at least it is in the Basic range. The *average* scores for the other groups still need to improve significantly just to reach the Basic level.

The data for the math assessments are similar. For 12<sup>th</sup>-graders taking the NAEP 2000 math test, the gaps ranged from 34 points for African Americans to 15 points for Native Americans, and the gaps remain nearly the same as they were in 1990.

A closer look at the data reveals that these gaps continue even between the highest-performing white students and students of color. For example, NAEP uses four proficiency levels in its scoring (Advanced, Proficient, Basic, Below Basic). Among 12<sup>th</sup>-graders on the 2000 math assessment, 20 percent of white students scored in the Proficient or Advanced range. Among African Americans, however, only 3 percent scored in the Proficient or Advanced range. For Hispanics, 4 percent scored in this range, as did 10 percent of Native Americans. The gap between higher-scoring whites and higher scorers of other groups on the 2000 NAEP reading exam (which was given only to 4<sup>th</sup>-graders) was similar.

**Another aspect of the achievement gap that frustrates educators, policymakers, and**

**NAEP Scores**

**Grade 4 Reading**

	White	Black	Hispanic	Native American	Asian
1992	225	193	201	207	214
1998	227	194	196	202	225
2000	226	193	197	196	232

**Grade 8 Science**

	White	Black	Hispanic	Native American	Asian
1996	159	121	129	148	152
2000	162	122	128	134	156

**Grade 12 Mathematics**

	White	Black	Hispanic	Native American	Asian
1992	306	276	284	-	316
2000	308	274	283	293	319

**Percent of 12<sup>th</sup>-Grade Students Scoring in the Proficient or Advanced Range (NAEP 2000 Math Assessment)**

White	20%
African American	3%
Latino	4%
Native American	10%

**Percent of 4<sup>th</sup>-Grade Students Scoring in the Proficient or Advanced Range (NAEP 2000 Reading Assessment)**

White	40%
African American	12%
Latino	16%
Native American	17%

parents alike is that it persists regardless of parents' income or education levels, which have long been held as strong predictors of children's achievement.

As *Education Week* reported in its series on the achievement gap, "the one improvement that many educators had hoped to see as more Blacks and Hispanics rose to the middle class has failed to emerge: Stubborn gaps persist even in integrated, largely middle-class suburbs like Evanston, Illinois and Montclair, New Jersey." In its 1999 study,

*Reaching the Top*, the College Board found that "at all parent education levels, African Americans and Latinos had much lower average reading scores than whites. Moreover, the Black-white gap was much larger for students whose parent had a college degree than for students with no parent who has a high school diploma."<sup>8</sup>

The implications of the achievement gap are indeed serious for at least four reasons. First, these gaps clearly point to a perpetuation of existing social and economic inequities. As the College Board wrote, "America is a diverse society in which

educational differences have the potential to become a progressively larger source of inequality and social conflict."<sup>9</sup> And, the Study Group

general public about who can learn and who wants to succeed. It can also lead to a "downward spiral" in which students in some communi-

ties have fared so poorly in the system that it has become a cultural norm to devalue traditional academic achievement. Chapter 2 describes in detail many ways in which *schools*, rather than individuals, erect barriers to achievement among students from diverse cultures. But, in a nation that believes in its status as a meritocracy, individuals

can be blamed for their own intellectual failures even when the system shoulders a significant portion of the blame. The Study Group wants to make clear that this comment does not imply that individuals are not responsible for their own success. Clearly, our belief in equal opportunity and equal possibilities for all depends as much on individual responsibility as it does on institutional responsibility. But when institutions don't do all they can to foster achievement and eliminate stereotype-based discriminatory practices such as tracking into lower academic programs, holding lower expecta-

### Other Measures of the Achievement Gap

The gap in NAEP test scores corresponds with equally discouraging discrepancies in many areas of educational attainment. Consider, for example, the following data:

- In 1995, 87 percent of whites aged 25 to 29 had earned a high school diploma or equivalent. Encouragingly, African Americans had reached a similar figure, but only 57 percent of Latino and 63 percent of Native Americans (1990 data) had received a diploma.<sup>10</sup>
- In 1995, 31 percent of whites had received a bachelor's degree by the time they were twenty-five years old. The percentage of African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans who graduated from college was only half that number.<sup>11</sup>
- In San Diego, while only 2 percent of white students dropped out during their four years in a low-poverty high school, this number was roughly 6 percent for African Americans and 7 percent for Latinos. At high-poverty high schools, the four-year dropout rate was roughly 10 percent for whites, 17 percent for African Americans, and 23 percent for Latinos.<sup>12</sup>

would add, America is becoming an *increasingly* diverse society with a duty to ensure that all students achieve to their highest potential academically—and reap the economic and social benefits that achievement implies. In a nation that believes deeply in its identity as a meritocracy, achievement gaps that trace so clearly along racial and ethnic lines simply cannot be justified.

Second, persistent low achievement among students of color can contribute to stereotyping and prejudiced assumptions among educators, policymakers, and the

tions of achievement, or counseling students away from more challenging classes, those institutions are denying individuals the opportunity to exercise their responsibility.

Third, the gaps among higher-scorers on national tests exacerbate existing inequities. By and large, students who do well on NAEP and Advanced Placement tests are those who will be more successful in competitive colleges and universities, who are more likely to attend graduate school, who will do well in their professions, and who will become local, state, and national leaders. Shortages of high-scoring students among communities of color continue the nation's historical under-representation of people of color in government, businesses, professions, and a long list of leadership positions.

Finally, America needs every citizen to achieve to his or her potential. A key component of the country's economic engine has always been its creative, flexible, productive workforce, which today translates into being lifelong learners. The nation cannot afford to leave great numbers of individuals—indeed, whole groups of people—behind. To do so would be as unwise as it would be unjust.

### **Intolerance**

As the nation grows more diverse, tensions among different racial, ethnic, and language groups continue to flare. In its most common manifestation, intolerance includes individual *beliefs* that some racial and ethnic groups are inherently less intelligent, more prone to violence, poverty, or

disease, or more hostile toward American values and ideals than other groups. In more extreme cases, tensions can lead to racially and ethnically motivated *actions* that range from name calling on the playground to life-threatening violence. For example, about 10,000 people have been victims of reported hate crimes each year since 1995, and the number of hate-oriented websites more than doubled from 1997 to 2000. Schools are not immune to this kind of intolerance. On the contrary, “Teenagers and young adults account for a significant proportion of the country’s hate crimes both as perpetrators and as victims. Hate-motivated behavior, whether in the form of ethnic conflict, harassment, intimidation, or graffiti, is often apparent on school grounds. Hate violence is also perpetrated by [more than 600 identified hate groups

“When a great many individuals—and whole groups of people—do not have a genuine chance to develop their academic talents fully, our society is much poorer for their lack of educational opportunities.”  
—The College Board<sup>13</sup>

across the nation], which actively work to recruit young people to their ranks.”<sup>14</sup>

The influence of hate and bigotry has been apparent in schools across the country, **as tensions between white and non-white students, as well as tensions between different groups of students from diverse cultures, have been reported.** In Fairbanks, Alaska, for example, a school district joined

with 17 community organizations to request intervention from the U.S. Department of Justice Community Relations Service after the KKK directed recruitment activities at the school and a series of hate crime incidents occurred against African American and native Alaskan residents. At a high school in Tucson, Arizona, the federal government was called in following two months of racial violence among white, Black, and Hispanic students, with one incident requiring the response of more than 120 law enforcement officers. In Suffolk County, New York, racial tensions escalated into violence after white students distributed flyers promoting white supremacy.

The good news about intolerance in schools, however, is two-fold. First, the vast majority of students *do not* participate in overtly intolerant behavior. Second, no child is born with attitudes that give rise to hateful violence or harassment, and prejudice can be reduced with effective curricula and programming at school. The U.S. Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools notes that “Prejudice and the resulting violence can be reduced or even eliminated by instilling in children an appreciation and respect for each other’s differences, and by helping them to develop empathy, conflict resolution, and critical thinking skills.”<sup>15</sup>

The bad news is that schools continue to institutionalize intolerance in a number of insidious ways. Chapter 2 discusses in detail ways in which our education system overall continues to model intolerance—ways that include refusing to acknowledge the

cultural basis of different learning styles, developing parent involvement programs that fail to welcome diverse individuals into schools, systematically failing to provide necessary resources and qualified teachers, neglecting the fact that knowledge and skills among students of color and immigrant students may need to be evaluated in unconventional ways, and, perhaps most destructively, demonstrating implicit acceptance of the idea that not all students can or will learn to high standards.

## A Call to Action

Rapidly increasing diversity among America's school children, the unresponsiveness of schools to the need to bring this growing number of diverse students to high standards, and the many overt displays of intolerance combined with more subtle institutional intolerance on the part of the education system requires policymakers to give new attention to what schools need in order to foster tolerance, a sense of unity, and high achievement among *all* students. This is no small task, and it is one that no state or nation has yet achieved. Still, the Study Group believes that no modern democracy can thrive with schools that allow biased underachievement and misguided stereotyping to continue unchecked.

"When four in five [individuals] or more say that they are proud of their heritage, and when one-third to two-thirds of all [people] say that this heritage is very important to their self-definition, then we must pay attention to this factor."

—James J. Zogby<sup>16</sup>

In order to foster true democratic opportunity and participation, the Study Group believes that practitioners and policymakers need to develop a *culturally competent* system that helps all students and school staff interact constructively with individuals from diverse racial, ethnic, and language backgrounds; builds among community groups and educational

institutions the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they need to help all students achieve to high standards; and fosters a renewed focus on the ideals that bind rather than divide all Americans. In broad terms, a culturally competent system addresses persistent underachievement, stereotyping, and intolerance by focusing on three related aims:

- ***Culturally Competent Schools Encourage Individuals to Understand Differences.*** Cultural competency requires the preparation of all students for participation in a diverse society and global workforce. This includes developing skills to critique personal and foreign cultural elements and place them in the context of human experience as well as the skills to navigate immersion in personally foreign cultures. As noted in *An American Tapestry*, initial state policies on cultural diversity were a direct response

to a rising demand for ethnic studies, and the most common approach for including multiculturalism in education was through the social studies curriculum. While this process certainly includes learning about diverse cultures, languages, and racial/ethnic groups, the Study Group believes that preparing students to succeed in a diverse world requires more than surveying knowledge about world cultures. It requires students to learn elements of cultural critique and analysis and to understand how specific experiences of discrete racial, ethnic, linguistic, or cultural groups relate to the human experience.

- ***Culturally Competent Schools Foster High Standards.*** Developing cultural competency requires schools and teachers to be able to apply existing knowledge about racial, ethnic, cultural, and language differences to what we know about differences in learning styles and the importance of environmental support for learning to ensure that all students reach high standards of achievement. From standards-based reforms to high-stakes assessments and accountability efforts, public schools have been under growing pressure to ensure that all students meet high standards of academic excellence. While some of these efforts are bearing positive results, a large number of students from various cultural, racial, ethnic, and linguistic

backgrounds are failing to meet the new content and performance standards set by state and local policymakers. Indeed, according to many measures of academic achievement, the differences among ethnic, racial, and linguistic student populations have continued to grow. Whatever the reason, there is a danger that the standards movement can create a two-tiered society of those who meet standards and those who do not. Results from current assessments such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress suggest that these tiers would be far from color- and language-blind. Without clear, effective strategies to foster high standards among *all* students, America's schools run the risk of relegating new immigrant, non-English speaking, and non-white students to the figurative back of the school bus.

- ***Culturally Competent Schools Strengthen National Ideals.*** Much has been made of the differences that divide the American community—language, religion, ethnicity, culture, and many other variables that segment the nation into countless discrete communities. Indeed, it seems that most Americans, regardless of cultural background or generations in this country remain very proud of and identify with their heritage.<sup>17</sup> Certainly, exploring the characteristics that people use to define themselves and others is critical to a culturally

competent system of education. But public schools also foster a shared understanding of what it means to participate in U.S. civil, economic, and political society. Despite very real differences of background and experience, the binding fabric of American society are things on which most people agree—the democratic process, economic opportunity, equality and civil rights, due process, and individual freedoms. These shared ideals need to form a foundation upon which everyone can be

encouraged to examine individual differences. Already, Americans from all walks of life have much in common, and researchers find that Americans from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds share many beliefs and values.<sup>18</sup> While recognizing the importance of acknowledging where people come from and building that knowledge into curriculum and instruction, culturally competent schools also nurture the national and universal ideals that form the foundation of civil society.

### **Cultural Competence as a Global Imperative**

The globalization of the economy and of communications means that businesses and industries desperately need today's students to be able to navigate culturally and linguistically diverse environments when they enter the workforce. According to the National Alliance of Business, companies large and small are vying for employees who have the knowledge and understanding of the cultures and languages of countries in which businesses want to succeed. "The globalization of the economy is driving this globalization of the workforce, and U.S. companies are leading the way in hiring a truly multicultural staff. Companies value talented people of diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and abilities to help them compete, grow, and innovate in dozens of countries all over the world and here in the United States. Workforce diversity no longer springs from politics or legislation, either. The very definition of 'diversity' is more complex. The word is no longer short-hand for outdated Black-and-white, majority-minority juxtapositions; today these distinctions are blurring. In California, Texas, and Florida, for example, 'minorities' actually constitutes majorities. The old labels are anachronisms."<sup>19</sup>

Claibourne Smith of DuPont agrees, saying that, "Diversity is perceived and treated as a business imperative as opposed to the moral or right thing to do. [American] students still remain too isolated from people who are different from them, too insulated in their own cultures and languages. They are not learning respect for differences or the cooperative business skills they need to contribute effectively in diverse work teams."<sup>20</sup>

The Study Group believes that it is important to note that culturally competent schools are *not* simply schools that offer a smorgasbord of knowledge about other cultures. Nor are they schools that cater solely to the ethnic, racial, cultural, or linguistic preferences of their immediate community. Rather, culturally competent schools give students, regardless of how they identify themselves, a sense of their value in the world and their community; a set of intellectual tools with which to understand and critique their own identity in relation to others'; an understanding of the national and universal values that bind diverse individuals into a larger community; a fluency with culture and identity that can help them feel more comfortable with individuals who are different from themselves; and knowledge and abilities that equip them to make important contributions to the national and global economy. Culturally competent schools also model these elements of knowledge and skill by seeing diversity as a source of strength rather than weakness, building an environment that disallows stereotyping and brings to bear all that is known about teaching and learning to insist that no student be left behind in the movement toward high standards.

## Conclusion

Clearly, schools that take seriously their mission of fostering a pluralist democracy and bringing all students to high standards have their work cut out for them. But the Study Group believes that no less is at stake here than the credibility of the education system as a front-line democratic and meritocratic institution. Schools need to think of new ways to help all students—from every racial, ethnic, and cultural background—develop the knowledge and skills they need to achieve to their highest ability. Schools also need to ensure that the nation is prepared to combat the stereotypes and the bigotry that refuse to acknowledge that individuals from all backgrounds have important contributions to make to every aspect of American life. Nothing less than our nation's integrity as a pluralist, meritocratic democracy is in question.

Chapter 2 examines specific ways in which our nation's schools are not structured to seize upon the opportunities afforded by diversity. As a result of outdated or unresponsive curriculum, student placement, teaching methods, organization, administration, funding formulas,

and staffing processes, schools are chronically failing to prepare all students to achieve to high standards; to encourage students to accept that all racial, cultural, and ethnic groups can contribute to all aspects of our national life; and to embolden students to participate in a diverse national and global economic, political, and social environment.

Chapter 3 presents the Study Group's six points for building culturally competent schools. Building upon the barriers presented in Chapter 2, this chapter puts forth a vision of schools that build cultural competency into all aspects of curriculum, standards, organization, teaching methods, and staffing. Put into practice, these six points encourage schools to realize their full purpose as front-line meritocratic institutions that confirm our national identity as a pluralist democracy.

Finally, in a concluding essay, NASBE Executive Director Brenda Welburn speaks specifically to the need for schools to play a significant role in developing—in every child—a sense of responsibility and of belonging to the American community.

## Chapter 2

# Behind the Data: How Schools Inadvertently Perpetuate Inequity and Intolerance

For decades, schools have been frontline institutions in the struggle for equity and equal opportunity. Understanding the truth to the adage, “knowledge is power,” civil rights leaders have long focused on schools as one of the primary mechanisms by which people of all backgrounds can be afforded the opportunity to succeed. Conversely, denying students a decent public education is now viewed as a fundamental denial of civil rights. As a consequence of the special place of schools in the struggle for tolerance and equity, special programs such as special education, bilingual education, Title I, and desegregation orders, along with targeted funding streams and local initiatives such as tutoring and volunteer programs, have all been established to help all students achieve to their highest potential in schools.

Then why do intolerance and inequities in student achievement

continue to persist? The Study Group found that while the causes of these issues are exceedingly complex and in many ways bound up in social forces in communities and the nation at large, what happens within the education system—at all levels—is also a major contributor. Following are some of the most significant education-related factors that contribute to inequity and intolerance in public schools.

### Disproportionate Numbers of Students from Diverse Cultures Are Placed in Special Education and Other Lower-Track Programs

Students of color, new immigrant students, and students who are not fluent in English are segregated by placement in any number of second-system programs initiated to respond to diverse student needs

(such as English as a Second Language, Title I, and special education). For example, multiple studies report on the consistent, disproportionate representation of students of color in special education programs. In 1998, approximately 1.5 million students of color were identified as having mental retardation, emotional disturbance, or a specific learning disability,<sup>21</sup> with African American children almost three times more likely than white children to be labeled “mentally retarded.” While poverty and other socio-economic factors correlate highly with the incidence of disability among nearly all groups and across most categories of disability, once socio-economic factors are accounted for, the effect of race and ethnicity on placement in special education remains significant. In fact, as measures of wealth and school quality increase, African American boys are actually at *greater* risk of being disproportionately labeled with a disability.<sup>22</sup>

Once assigned to pull-out programs or special classes through a system of *de facto* programmatic segregation, substantial evidence shows that students receive inferior instruction that relies heavily on “drill and kill” activities and worksheets rather than stimulating class discussions and projects and less actual classroom instructional time. As a consequence, they continue to fall further behind their peers; studies have documented that some students can systematically miss a semester or even a whole year of classroom instruction in a subject due to being “pulled out” for compensatory services. In general, there is a tendency to underestimate what students placed in compensatory programs can do; to provide less instruction, more repetition, and watered-down curriculum; and to fail to provide motivating contexts to accelerate learning. These programs become self-fulfilling prophecies of low achievement. Assigning disproportionate numbers of students from diverse cultures into lower-track programs can also fuel damaging and inaccurate stereotypes about the ability of particular racial and ethnic groups to achieve to high standards.

### Students from Diverse Cultures Attend Schools with a Lower-Level Curriculum

Even apart from their overrepresentation in compensatory programs, students from diverse cultures and non-native English speakers are more often relegated to high-poverty schools that commonly offer lower-level courses that ignore their need for challenging, rigorous

coursework; do not honor their goals and visions; and fail to provide appropriate academic and social supports. Researchers with the Education Trust have painted disturbing portraits of the low expectations they have found at some schools. They have been “stunned,” writes Kati Haycock,

by how little is expected of students in high-poverty schools—how few assignments they get in a given school week or month. Stunned, second, by the low level of the few assignments that they do get. In high-poverty urban middle schools, for example, we see a lot of coloring assignments, rather than writing or mathematics assignments. Even at the high school level, we found coloring assignments. “Read *To Kill a Mockingbird*,” says the 11<sup>th</sup>-grade

English teacher, “and when you’re finished, color a poster about it.”<sup>23</sup>

Most of those who work trying to turn around low-performing, high-poverty schools report similar findings of inadequate curriculum. In *No Excuses*, the Heritage Foundation’s report on seven principals who succeeded in low-income schools, one principal who was assigned to a school on the south side of Chicago found “there was no reading program in kindergarten and no significant writing anywhere in the curriculum, and most of the learning was of a mundane skill-based sort that could never lead to the advanced curriculum in math and science that the [school] council had envisioned.”<sup>24</sup>

Similarly, Maxine Bleich, president of Ventures Education Systems Corporation, a New York City organization dedicated to helping students of color and disadvantaged students achieve in school, has found the prevalence of low-content, low-

#### Reforming the Curriculum

In his report, *No Excuses: Seven Principals of Low-Income Schools Who Set the Standard for High Achievement*, Samuel Casey Carter describes the following actions taken by the new principal at Chicago’s Earhart Elementary School:<sup>25</sup>

“When [she] arrived, there was no reading program in kindergarten and no significant writing anywhere in the curriculum, and most of the learning was of a mundane skill-based sort that could never lead to the advanced curriculum in math and science that the [school] council had envisioned.

“Grammar and basic essay composition lead quickly to higher-level research writing by the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. Monthly oral presentations provide ample opportunities for public speaking. A Junior Great Books program, complete with literary seminars, gives the children a sophisticated forum for the development of their higher-order thinking skills and art of conversation.”

level courses one of the principal stumbling blocks to high achievement. "The schools with which I have worked the longest have managed, by providing rigorous academic programs, giving proper guidance and support, and setting high expectations, to send 30 percent more students to college than the national average, despite their poverty and disadvantaged backgrounds."<sup>26</sup>

Such observations are borne out statistically by data showing that

students of color are less likely to take higher-level mathematics courses (or even Algebra I classes), and are much less likely to be found in gifted and talented programs or in Advanced Placement (AP) courses, or to take the AP examinations (see table below). Other research has found that performance standards also tend to differ across schools: that is, work that earns an "A" in high-poverty schools would only earn a "C" in low-poverty schools.<sup>27</sup>

### Students Are Not Exposed to an Inquiry-Based Multicultural Curriculum

One of the most critical elements of building a high-quality, equitable school system that respects diversity is to ensure that the curriculum is designed to bring all students to high standards and give them the knowledge, skills, and dispositions they need to thrive within our

#### Course-Taking

This table uses data from four states in different regions of the country to show the percentage of Blacks and Latinos in gifted and talented programs and Advanced Placement classes, compared with the overall percentage of these groups within the overall student population

	Percent of student population	Percent of gifted and talented students	Percent of AP English students	Percent of AP calculus students
<b>Texas</b>				
Black	14.4	10.3	6.0	5.5
Latino	37.9	26.4	21.8	20.6
Asian	2.4	4.8	9.1	13.5
Native American	.3	.24	LR*	LR*
<b>New Jersey</b>				
Black	18.5	6.7	2.9	4.0
Latino	14.0	7.2	4.1	3.9
Asian	5.7	8.2	17.0	22.5
Native American	.2	.1	LR	LR
<b>Wisconsin</b>				
Black	9.8	4.6	.6	.9
Latino	3.6	1.7	1.3	.8
Asian	3.0	3.1	3.4	3.9
Native American	1.4	.55	LR	LR
<b>Oregon</b>				
Black	2.6	1.39	.2	.4
Latino	8.1	2.31	2.3	2.1
Asian	3.5	4.6	7.6	12.7
Native American	2.1	.8	LR	LR

\*Limited Reliability

Sources: U.S. Department of Education, *1998 Elementary and Secondary School Civil Rights Compliance Report* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2000); The College Board, *2000 Advanced Placement State and National Summary Reports* (Princeton, NJ: The College Board, 2000). Compiled by Education Trust.

national diversity and engage in the economic, social, and political global arenas. A curriculum that helps students develop these elements is rich with examples of the important roles that myriad cultures have played in shaping human experience. This curriculum also needs to give students the knowledge they need to understand and critically analyze their own and others' cultures, recognize and reject stereotyping, and envision diversity within the context of shared American values and ideals. Finally, it needs to develop students' knowledge in the subjects of world history, foreign language, and world geography. American public schools have been historically bad at this, focusing as they did for a century on *assimilating* all students, particularly new immigrants, into one "American" culture and "American" view of the world. Knowledge of other cultural practices, along with their history, religion, language, and geography, (e.g., those of immigrants) seldom figured in school curricula.<sup>28</sup>

In the 1960s, critics of the "assimilation" model of schooling insisted that schools include the cultural, political, and economic contributions of people with non-European ancestry in the curriculum. This "multicultural education" movement, begun alongside the civil rights movement, was also an attempt to address social inequities among racial and ethnic groups and curricular inadequacies that adversely affected students from communities of color.<sup>29</sup>

From its inception, multicultural education has been highly contentious and disparaged by voices from across the political and

social spectrum. For example, some critics contend that multicultural education can divide rather than unite people by focusing on differences rather than commonalities; that it presents a glorified notion of the cultures of traditionally marginalized racial and ethnic groups at the expense of the majority culture; and that it encourages "cultural relativism," the belief that one cultural practice is as good as any other and no practices should be rejected. Another school of thought argues that most multicultural curricula do not go far enough in compelling students to challenge racism and cultural hegemony and that much of multicultural education acts to placate communities of color rather than change the predominant culture. Some critics also fear that multicultural education may lower academic standards by emphasizing notions such as *self-esteem* and *tolerance* that schools cannot, and should not, teach or evaluate. Relatedly, some critics are concerned that multicultural education takes important time and focus away from the standard curriculum of reading, math, science, and social studies. Finally, critics across the spectrum have struggled with the politically contentious issue of exactly what knowledge, and which cultures, should be included in a multicultural curriculum.

At its worst, multicultural education has arguably manifest all of the above characteristics at one time or another. It has also gotten embroiled in heated political disagreements about the purpose of schools, the appropriate content of the curriculum, and the appropriate degree of importance of particular

contributions made by communities of color to our national fabric. The response to this controversy on the part of many policymakers and practitioners has been to avoid multiculturalism altogether and rely instead upon outmoded notions of what students need to know about our nation and the world around us. This response denies students a knowledge base by which they can begin to understand and evaluate the role of all racial, ethnic, and cultural groups in the nation and the world as well as the skills of cultural inquiry, which are critical in order for students to be able to evaluate and critique their own and others' cultures within a framework of shared values and national ideologies.

Finally, besides the more controversial elements of multicultural education, students need to know world history, civics, geography, and foreign languages. Yet students in the United States are some of the least knowledgeable about these important subjects. The 1998 NAEP civics results, for example, demonstrated that 27 percent of white students, and 56 to 58 percent of 12<sup>th</sup>-grade Blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans, scored Below Basic. In the 1994 NAEP geography assessment, 22 percent of white students, 68 percent of blacks, 52 percent of Hispanics and 31 percent of Asian 12<sup>th</sup>-graders scored Below Basic. In foreign languages, the good news is that the number of courses taken by high school graduates has increased steadily since 1982; the bad news, however, is that students still take an average of fewer than two years of foreign language in high school, and Black and Hispanic students lag considerably behind white students.<sup>30</sup>

## A Typology of Multicultural Education

Several attempts have been made to detail the various educational strategies that fall under the broad umbrella of multicultural education—to develop a “typology.” A typology can provide a useful framework for thinking about multicultural education, giving educators—and others—a clearer understanding of what people mean by the term. The multicultural education typology presented here is made up of programs that can be broadly divided into three categories, according to their primary emphasis: content-oriented, student-oriented, and socially-oriented. Each is discussed below.

**Content-Oriented Programs (COPs)** are the most common and recognizable type of multicultural education. Their primary goal is to include content about different cultural groups in the curriculum and educational materials in order to increase students’ knowledge about these groups. In their simplest form, COPs incorporate such things as a few short readings or a few in-class celebrations of diverse cultural heroes and holidays. Other COPs take a more thorough approach, adding numerous multicultural materials and themes to the curriculum. More sophisticated versions actively transform the curriculum. These programs have three goals:

- to develop multicultural content throughout the disciplines;
- to incorporate a variety of different viewpoints and perspectives in the curriculum; and
- to develop a new paradigm for the curriculum.

**Student-Oriented Programs (StOPs)** specifically address the academic needs of carefully defined groups of students, often students of color. Many StOPs are designed not to transform the curriculum or the social context of education, but to help culturally or linguistically different students transition into the educational mainstream. To do this, these programs often draw upon the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of students and take many forms, some of which are not typically thought of as multicultural education:

- programs that use research into culturally based learning styles in an attempt to determine which teaching styles to use with a particular group of students;
- bilingual or bicultural programs; and
- special math and science programs for students of color or female students.

Because they attempt to help students make the transition into the mainstream, many student-oriented programs can be viewed as compensatory; in fact, they can often be nearly indistinguishable from other compensatory programs that may not be multicultural.

**Socially Oriented Programs (SOPs)** seek to reform both schooling and the cultural and political contexts of schooling to increase cultural and racial tolerance and reduce bias. SOPs encompass not only programs designed to restructure and desegregate schools, but also programs designed to increase contact among races, programs to encourage teachers from diverse cultures, anti-bias programs, and cooperative learning programs. They emphasize human relations and incorporate some characteristics of the other two program types. SOPs also include less common programs with socially oriented and social activist goals that emphasize pluralism and cultural equity in the whole of society. In order to reach their goals, such programs can employ a number of approaches. Many emphasize the application of critical thinking skills to critiquing racism, sexism, and other types of repression; some emphasize multilingualism; others attempt to examine issues from a large number of viewpoints different from that of the predominant culture; still others can utilize cooperative learning approaches and decision-making skills in order to prepare students to become socially active citizens.

—Quoted and adapted from G. Burnett, *Varieties of Multicultural Education: An Introduction*, ERIC Digest Number 98 (New York, NY: ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education, 1994).

## Diverse Ways of Learning among Students Are Not Acknowledged with Differentiated Instruction

Research over the last twenty years has pointed out that individuals perceive and process information in different ways. Yet traditional forms of instruction have often been grounded in the dominant culture and have marginalized the points of reference, orientations, and ways of understanding that students from diverse cultures bring to school.<sup>31</sup> As a matter of fact, some learning theorists believe that what students learn has more to do with whether the educational experience is rich with differentiated instruction than whether or not they are “capable” of mastering the material.

Although psychologists and educators disagree about the exact form and function of culturally based learning, there is clear agreement in the field on at least three key issues that highlight the importance of incorporating differentiated instruction into teaching and learning:

- Not everyone learns best in exactly the same way;
- A student’s particular learning needs and preferences, if accommodated through differentiated instruction, can result in improved attitudes toward learning and increased productivity, academic achievement, and creativity; and

- While there is considerable variation in behavior and instructional needs within cultural groups and no student should ever be ascribed specific instructional preferences or needs based solely on their race or ethnicity, some elements of instructional preferences are affected by cultural values and practices.<sup>32</sup>

Failure to master a curriculum, then, can be due to a host of circumstances that have nothing to do with a student’s ability or overall desire to learn. For example, students may find it hard to learn because they receive an inadequate level of assistance, do not understand directions, dislike the learning task, are distracted by a change in class schedule or environment, are distracted by extraneous stimuli, do not understand the criteria for completion of a learning task, or do not see the learning activity as relevant or useful.

When schools neglect to accommodate even one particular need, the oversight may have a disproportionately adverse impact on students from specific racial, ethnic, or cultural groups. For example, there is considerable evidence that African American students are more likely to prefer working in collaborative groups to achieve common goals.<sup>33</sup> Students from Southeast Asia tend to learn more passively than some other students.<sup>34</sup> Hispanic culture tends to emphasize “obedience and to value respect for adult authority. A directive style of communication [in families] is most common, with little collaborative conversation [or] elaborated speech models.”<sup>35</sup> Of course, acknowledging culturally influenced learning preferences does

not suggest that students can be pigeonholed according to race or ethnicity; rather, it suggests that schools must adopt a number of teaching and learning techniques to ensure that students’ learning preferences are addressed.

## Schools Fail to Value the Identities that Students Bring with Them to School

[Successful] schools [that] enroll students from diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups view cultural inclusiveness as a means of enhancing learning and participation for all students. These schools incorporate diversity and promote multiculturalism through planning, instruction, special activities, and school environment. [They] embrace the diversity of their students as a resource that enriches learning. By celebrating cultural influences, prejudices gradually give way to understanding and respect for differences, making room for each student’s individuality. Such schools become the cultural hubs of their communities.

—U.S. Department of Education<sup>36</sup>

Evidence is mounting that school environment matters, and affirming the value of each student’s identity in school fosters positive academic and personal development. For example, one study found cognitive gains for children in a pre-school

program that integrated material on African American culture across the curriculum.<sup>37</sup> Another demonstrated how elements of non-European cultural traditions can be used to teach complex mathematics concepts to diverse students in urban schools.<sup>38</sup> Other evidence confirms that integrating multicultural studies across the curriculum can improve math, reading, and language scores, particularly among students of color.<sup>39</sup> Conversely, when students from different ethnic and racial groups interact in a non-inclusive environment, their racial antipathies are likely to increase.<sup>40</sup>

Student identity is also important because it suggests culturally specific learning preferences that may impact the ways students become engaged in information and relate to teachers and classmates. As noted above, failure on the part of schools to accommodate even one particular differentiated learning preference may have a disproportionately adverse impact on students from specific racial, ethnic, or cultural groups.

One important way that schools can demonstrate their regard for students' identities, and increase student achievement at the same time, is to foster meaningful links between parents and schools. Yet according to a 1992 PTA survey, over 80 percent of parents do not feel they have the time to become involved in their child's school, a third of parents feel they have nothing to contribute to their child's education, and another third don't understand

the system or do not know how to become involved. One quarter of all parents say they feel intimidated at the thought of becoming involved in their child's school. Even more alarmingly, low-income parents and parents of color are often underrepresented among involved parents, even though "disadvantaged children have the most to gain from parent involvement programs."<sup>41</sup>

children often become completely alienated from school by the time they are eight years old."<sup>44</sup>

### Students of Color Tend to Have Less-Qualified Teachers

Students of color are much more likely to have teachers who are inexperienced, have fewer qualifications for teaching, or are teaching out of their fields of certification. This matters because research is making increasingly clear the link between good teaching and student achievement. More and more, teachers, policymakers, parents, and others are realizing that student achievement is not solely predetermined by socio-economic status, parent involvement, or race and ethnicity. On the contrary, recent evidence makes clear that regardless of the factors that students bring to school, good teachers measurably increase student learning, and good schools foster high levels of student achievement in large part because of the quality of their teachers. Although more research about the link between

effective teaching and high levels of student learning is still needed, the connection is clear and unequivocal (see box at left).

Despite clear evidence of the importance of high-quality teachers, a number of state-level studies have found that students of color are more likely to be taught by less-qualified or less-able teachers. In Tennessee, African American students were almost twice as likely as white students to be taught by ineffective teachers. Similar patterns were found

**Teacher Effectiveness Research**

A number of studies have tracked the effects of teachers on student achievement. One study from Tennessee shows that two 2<sup>nd</sup>-graders who perform equally on a standardized test can be separated by 50 percentile points by the 5<sup>th</sup> grade solely as a consequence of being taught by different teachers.<sup>45</sup> The Boston Public Schools charted the progress of 10<sup>th</sup>-grade students by teacher assignment. The gains of the students with the top third teachers were six times those with teachers in the bottom third. The students with the teachers in the bottom third demonstrated virtually no growth (0.3).<sup>46</sup>

Evidence is clear and unequivocal: "students at all grade levels do better academic work and have more positive school attitudes, higher aspirations, and other positive behaviors if they have parents who are aware, knowledgeable, encouraging, and involved."<sup>42</sup> Low-income students and students of color have the most to gain when parents become involved in schools.<sup>43</sup> Conversely, "if the attitudes, behavior, and expectations of the school staff are substantially different from those at home,

in Texas: as the percentage of white students increased, the average teachers' score on the basic literacy examination (the Texas Examination of Current Administrators and Teachers) increased as well. The Texas data also showed that poor white students were more likely to have well-qualified teachers than poor African American children,<sup>47</sup> and hence the differences cannot be ascribed simply to relative wealth of the students' families.

Similar patterns were found in teacher quality data from other states, particularly when examining schools in central cities. A recent study in New York State that looked at teacher workforce data over 15 years reached the following conclusions:<sup>48</sup>

- The quality of teachers is "much worse in large urban areas in comparison to other regions."
- Even within urban areas, the average poor or African American or Latino student "is much more likely to have a lower-quality teacher than the typical non-poor or white student."
- New York City salaries for starting teachers "are about 25 percent lower than those for teacher starting careers in [the] New York suburbs." This gap has been increasing since 1990.

"In Texas, and certainly in other places, too, attracting and retaining talented people with strong skills to teach in the districts where black students are heavily represented is part of the unfinished business of equalizing education opportunity."

—Ronald Ferguson<sup>49</sup>

- Teachers who begin their careers in New York City "are far more likely to leave the New York public school system than are teachers from other areas." At the same time, those teachers who did leave "are generally higher-quality teachers than those who remain."

Overall, the issue of teacher quality is so critical to student achievement that many researchers believe that if students from diverse cultures had teachers of the same quality as other children, a substantial portion of the achievement gap as measured by standardized tests would disappear. Statistical models show that as teacher scores on competency tests increase, there is a corollary decline in the percentage of students who fail standardized competency tests. Some researchers have projected that an increase in the test scores of teachers who work with African American children would produce a decrease of about two-thirds of the African American–white test score gap.<sup>50</sup>

## Students in High-Poverty Schools Have Fewer Resources

Despite over thirty years of equity- and adequacy-based school funding lawsuits, significant disparities in resources still exist—and students of color, new immigrant students, and students with limited English remain significantly over-represented in high poverty schools and school districts.<sup>51</sup> Orlofsky, using 1996-97 data from the Census Bureau and the U.S. Department of Education, has calculated the funding gap in state and local per-pupil revenues between the highest- and lowest-poverty districts, adjusted to reflect geographic cost differences and differences in student needs (see table at left). While seven states spent more per pupil in their highest-poverty districts, in most states spending favored the lowest-poverty districts. Nationally, the gap was \$1,139 more in per-pupil spending for the lowest-poverty districts. To put this in perspective, that would equal \$455,600 less funding for a high-poverty elementary school of 400 students. These findings come at the same time that a growing body of evidence has demonstrated that more money, invested in the right things, can improve the achievement of poor students and students of color.<sup>52</sup>

State and Local Revenues per Student, in Dollars

State	Gap between Districts	High-Poverty Districts	Low-Poverty Districts
Alabama	742	3925	4667
Alaska	514	5763	6277
Arizona	387	4176	4563
Arkansas	378	4108	4486
California	35	4367	4402
Colorado	580	4967	5547
Connecticut	635	6255	6890
Delaware	-83	6396	6313
Florida	178	5092	5270
Georgia	148	5116	5264
Idaho	227	4034	4261
Illinois	1939	4433	6372
Indiana	614	6471	7085
Iowa	456	5458	5914
Kansas	451	5305	5756
Kentucky	-150	5830	5680
Louisiana	997	3606	4603
Maine	269	5515	5784
Maryland	701	5096	5797
Massachusetts	-705	5892	5187
Michigan	1261	5898	7159
Minnesota	-264	6164	5900
Mississippi	331	3312	3643
Missouri	253	5241	5494
Montana	1538	4214	5752
Nebraska	318	5354	5672
Nevada	429	5166	5595
New Hampshire	1006	4791	5797
New Jersey	587	8325	8912
New Mexico	444	3605	4049
New York	2794	5307	8101
North Carolina	413	4464	4877
North Dakota	32	4480	4512
Ohio	667	5593	6260
Oklahoma	66	4176	4242
Oregon	-170	5238	5068
Pennsylvania	1059	5678	6737
Rhode Island	828	4912	5740
South Carolina	427	4806	5233
South Dakota	367	4595	4962
Tennessee	-138	4077	3939
Texas	386	4648	5034
Utah	-440	4225	3785
Vermont	684	7225	7909
Virginia	879	5103	5982
Washington	99	5235	5334
West Virginia	340	5260	5600
Wisconsin	676	6021	6697
Wyoming	895	5307	6202
<b>Nation</b>	<b>1139</b>	<b>4928</b>	<b>6067</b>

Source: The Education Trust, *The Other Gap: Poor Students Receive Fewer Dollars* (Data Bulletin, 6 March 2001). Analysis by Greg F. Orlofsky, based on 1996-97 U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Census Bureau data.

## Chapter 3

# What Can the Education System Do?

American public schools are intended to be frontline democratic institutions. They are supposed to give all students the knowledge and skills they need to be productive citizens. They are also—and this is especially important in an information-based economy—supposed to form the basis of a meritocracy, helping students succeed according to their will and their ability rather than according to family background or wealth. Finally, schools are supposed to help all students get along with one another. In other words, they are supposed to foster equity and tolerance. Seen in light of these goals, Chapter 2 pointed out ways in which our public school system has not been succeeding in a key part of its mission.

The good news is that *it doesn't have to be this way*. Despite the myriad factors behind inequity and intolerance in public schools, there are abundant examples of individual

schools, districts, and even states where educators have made enormous strides in raising achievement levels of large groups of diverse students and fostering tolerance and understanding among all students.

The bad news is that these success stories are not necessarily easy to duplicate. In the case of individual schools, there is frequently a truly exceptional principal who acts as a driving force, and a number of the schools—even when public—are at least partially schools of choice, drawing motivated parents who are willing to sign “contracts” guaranteeing their efforts in helping their children. Successful school districts may be fortunate in having a particularly united and active business and civic community that is fully behind the education effort. Such circumstances cannot be easily replicated through policy.

Still, there has been remarkable convergence among organizations of

divergent philosophical and political bent regarding the nature of practices that could substantially improve educational outcomes for all students, particularly for those who are low achievers. Research points to the importance of holding students to high aspirations, using data to drive change, and working closely with parents, to name just a few of the central tenets. The Study Group holds that these and other components of a culturally competent school system can do much to counter causes of intolerance and inequity. The six key components are detailed below.

### A Standards-Based System for All Students

For many years state boards of education across the country have emphasized the importance of academic standards as the foundation of state education

systems and a fundamental component of contemporary school reform. As NASBE's 1997 report, *The Full Measure*, puts it, it is the fundamental role of the state education system to "set academic and performance standards for students, educators, and the 'system'; to monitor performance in meeting these standards through fair, high-quality assessments and collection of other data; and to provide the necessary assistance and consequences to ensure that all students have an opportunity to achieve the standards."<sup>53</sup> **The Study Group on the Changing Face of America's School Children reaffirms the important role of states in setting and enforcing high academic standards, particularly in the context of ensuring that all students in this diverse nation are challenged and given the opportunity to achieve at high levels.** Only through the overarching system of standards and standards-based accountability can policymakers, educators, and parents be sure that no group of students are being left behind.

Standards have the benefit of making clear to schools what is expected of them, and in many cases this clarity helps low-performing schools refocus their curriculum on the salient elements that states are expecting students to learn. The Education Trust surveyed 1,200 schools that serve students from poverty-level households and yet score well on measures of student achievement and found that no particular instructional technique, instructional material,

### Assessing Students from Diverse Cultures

While most states have been able to set high standards that can help individual schools focus on academic expectations for all students, the job of evaluating the extent to which these standards have been met has proven to be particularly contentious. Students of color consistently test lower than white students on most measures of student achievement, but experts disagree on the extent to which this difference is a result of biases inherent in the assessment tools. Although most states, districts, and testing companies have gone to great lengths to ensure that their test questions are free of cultural bias, the assessment situation is complicated by several factors: the thousands of questions used every year on hundreds of different standardized tests make monitoring items for bias an ongoing challenge; wrong answers on just one or two questions can make a significant difference in a student's test score; and the increasing use of tests for promotion or graduation purposes has clearly raised the stakes for all concerned.

Furthermore, ensuring test validity for students who are not fluent in English is even more complex, since most assessments, by presenting instructions and problems in English, implicitly test language skills as well as subject knowledge. Many state policies set time limits for how long students may be exempted from state assessments because of lack of fluency in English. These time limits serve an important purpose in that they hold educators' feet to the fire in terms of bringing non-English speakers into mainstream curriculum and instruction as quickly as possible. Requiring all students to be tested as soon as possible also allows states to collect important data about how English language learners are faring academically. However, state time limits may have little relationship to the learning trajectory of some students and allow little adjustment for individual circumstances that may warrant testing on a different schedule.

In addition, it is neither fair nor sensible to test students for high-stakes purposes unless they have truly been provided with the classroom supports they need and real opportunities to learn the material in question. Yet evidence suggests that many students, particularly students of color, are not provided with the educational opportunities they need to learn the tested material, and so making high-stakes decisions about promotion or graduation based upon single measures of student achievement is highly susceptible to accusations of bias.

Finally, state and local education systems vary widely in how they use test information to change how effectively the system serves students from different demographic groups. Across all levels, the system needs measures to assess how well students are making progress in acquiring content-area knowledge and English. In addition, to determine program effectiveness over time and among different groups of students, it is critical to use data disaggregated by ethnicity to discern trends in student outcomes.

or curriculum was the source of the schools' exemplary achievement. Rather, each of these schools, despite differences, was characterized by a heavy emphasis on high academic standards for their students. As a matter of fact, "standards undergird each of the six findings of [the] report."<sup>54</sup> Related to the use of standards, these top-performing, high-poverty schools tend to:

- Use standards extensively to design curriculum and instruction, assess student work, and evaluate teachers;
- Increase instructional time in reading and math to help students meet standards;
- Implement comprehensive systems to monitor individual student progress and provide extra support to students as soon as it is needed;
- Focus their efforts to involve parents in helping students meet standards; and
- Have state or district accountability systems in place that have real consequences for adults (particularly principals), not just students, in the schools.

Clearly, setting high standards at the state level plays a significant role in helping schools improve instruction for students who need it most.

State standards can also go a long way in communicating to schools the importance of building knowledge and skills for cultural competency into the curriculum. As standards and accountability systems begin to take hold across the country, it is becoming clear that

when states define and measure important knowledge and skills, they also impact local decisions about curriculum, instruction, and evaluation. States that take seriously their responsibility to foster cultural competency need to consider their standards and evaluations in light of the knowledge and skills that cultural competency requires.

### **A Curriculum to Foster Cultural Competency**

Schools continue to miss tremendous opportunities to incorporate the richness of linguistic and cultural diversity into the mainstream of the teaching and learning process. Given the multitude of cultures in the world, it is impractical to teach about all of them. But is important to use what we know about effective instruction and high-level curriculum to inculcate interpersonal skills, cultural self awareness, and knowledge of inter-ethnic dynamics. Research indicates that there are a number of attributes of effective curriculum that achieve both increased academic proficiency as well as positive changes in attitudes toward other racial/ethnic groups.<sup>55</sup> Such a curriculum has three parts: 1) knowledge of cultures, their similarities, and their differences; 2) skills to understand, analyze, and critique familiar and unfamiliar cultures; and 3) shared values that form the basis for cultural analysis and tolerance.

#### ***A Culturally Competent Curriculum is Rich in Knowledge about Diverse Cultures***

One of the most important components of fostering cultural

competence among students is building in them the knowledge they need to understand and critically analyze their own and others' cultures. This curriculum includes knowledge about the groups of people that have played important roles in American history; the contributions of people across the globe to artistic, scientific, intellectual, and military history; and explicit knowledge about culture, how people create it, what it consists of, and what the role of culture is in national and world history. The Study Group believes this type of knowledge is important for several reasons:

- Racial and ethnic pluralism is a growing reality, which means that every student, in order to succeed socially and economically, needs to have the knowledge they need to live and work comfortably with people from different racial, cultural, religious, and ethnic groups.
- Children often acquire inaccurate beliefs and incomplete knowledge about their own and other racial, religious, cultural, and ethnic groups from a number of sources including families, friends, and media outlets. Public institutions such as schools have a responsibility to provide accurate and comprehensive information about race, culture, religion, and ethnicity to counter the incomplete and often conflicting messages conveyed by other information sources.
- Incomplete knowledge and false beliefs about racial and ethnic groups limit the perspectives of individuals from all groups and

can lead to stereotyping that can affect the social and economic opportunities available to members of all racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural groups.

- Students of color are more likely to succeed academically in an environment that includes accurate, context-based information about non-white histories and cultures.
- A pluralistic nation needs competing and creative ideas to spur innovation and progress. Homogeneity can limit change, and so the nation can suffer a loss of dynamic potential to the extent that diverse voices and competing cultures are suppressed, particularly in public institutions such as schools.

Education for cultural competency addresses each of these five reasons. It is high-quality, accurate, steeped in standards, and fair to all students. It can improve the achievement of all students, most particularly students from diverse cultures; help prepare all students for productive employment in a global economy; reduce the incidence of harassment and violence against individuals based on their racial or ethnic community; present a more accurate view of the role of European and non-European cultures in human history; and encourage students to critically analyze their own and others' cultures as they relate to life in a pluralistic, democratic, and global society.

A culturally competent multicultural curriculum does not reject the history and perspectives of

the dominant racial, ethnic, and cultural groups. Rather, it *contextualizes* them by examining the contributions of other racial, ethnic, and cultural groups to our national and world history. It does this in several ways:

- It examines both dominant and competing perspectives on the ways in which our nation tries to reconcile our democratic ideals with our actual history and actions.
- It examines different racial, cultural, and ethnic practices and beliefs that contribute to different perspectives.
- It requires students to study literary and intellectual works that represent dominant American thinking, but it places

### Religious Diversity in American Schools

American schools have long struggled with defining the appropriate role of religion in public schools. In their early years, public schools incorporated Protestant values and Bible readings into the curriculum, but this practice was never uniformly appreciated, and a comprehensive system of private Catholic schools grew in part as a response to the specific religious tone of public schools.

Today, religious diversity among public school students is greater than ever. From 1990 to 2001 the percentage of Americans who report being Christian has dropped ten percent; Protestants now make up roughly half of all Americans, and Catholics make up one-quarter. Conversely, over the same time period the number of Muslims and Buddhists in America has more than doubled, the number of Hindus more than tripled, and the number of Sikhs increased more than fourfold.<sup>56</sup> And the number of individuals who report being affiliated with less traditional religions or with no religion is also on the rise.

This religious diversity has clear implications for all public schools as they struggle with issues such as prayer in schools, the display of religious documents and other images on school grounds, and creationism in the science curriculum. But it also affects schools in more general ways. Policymakers and practitioners who build culturally competent schools need to consider ways that schools can demonstrate respect for the beliefs, practices, and traditions of all religious groups, and they need to figure out how to help all students understand and evaluate the religious perspectives of others. This is no small feat, and it is one at which schools do not generally have a successful track record. Viewing religion alongside race, ethnicity, language, and culture as a central aspect of cultural competency is an important step for practitioners and policymakers who take seriously their job of developing culturally competent individuals.



these works in the context of other intellectual and historical works that challenge the dominant perspective.

- Without promoting the ideologies or political goals of any specific group, a culturally competent curriculum identifies different ideologies and points out how conflict and competition among ideas fostered the development of our nation.

In general, an effective multicultural curriculum emphasizes the complexities of living in a pluralist democracy and uses factual knowledge and analysis to promote a *democratic* ideology. A multicultural curriculum that advances these tenets gives students the tools they need to participate in public discourse and civic action with people who differ from them in significant ways.

### ***A Culturally Competent Curriculum Encourages Cultural Inquiry***

In a pluralist, global society, students need to go beyond simply accumulating knowledge about racial, ethnic, and cultural groups. They need to be ready to examine new cultures at every turn, since existing cultures are fluid and new cultures frequently emerge. In other words, **possessing cultural competence means using knowledge and applying skills to make sense of new cultural information and to examine cultures in a more informed and critical light.**<sup>57</sup>

The *Cultural Inquiry Process* is one example of a technique to gather and analyze new cultural information. Created to help teachers address “puzzlements” about student performance in culturally diverse schools, this process demonstrates how to systematically use existing knowledge to develop new understandings about racial, ethnic, and cultural differences. This process includes six steps that can easily be adapted to help students make sense of new cultural practices, beliefs, and values. These steps are detailed in the box at right.

The Study Group believes it is important to point out that culturally competent students need to engage in cultural inquiry about their own, familiar culture alongside

When these two concepts—ethnicity and culture—are made indistinct, schools can become encumbered with new stereotypes. Cultural relativity is the logical outcome. In this view, equal value is posited for all cultural and religious expressions. In contrast, good education allows students to pursue objective criteria for determining what is good or bad, valuable or useless in any particular culture. Racism may affect the way one regards another’s culture or religion. But it does not follow that every articulated cultural or religious preference is racist.<sup>58</sup>

inquiry about cultures that are new and confusing. Being able to analyze, critique, and respond to observations about their own culture helps students understand that all cultures contain familiar elements, cultures borrow and learn from each other, and no culture is inherently more valuable than any other.

### ***Culturally Competent Schools Teach and Model Important Values***

Although it is important for students to believe that no culture is inherently more valuable than any other, the Study Group believes it is important to distinguish between this belief and “cultural relativism,” the belief that no culture is better or worse than any other and so culturally competent individuals should accept and tolerate *all* cultural practices. Unlike cultural competency, cultural relativism denies the critical role that values play in shaping and understanding culture. Cultural competency, on the other hand, contends that while all cultures are of equal value, particular cultural practices and beliefs can be critiqued according to a standard set of national values. Consequently, an awareness of personal and national values is a critical component of effective multicultural education.

### ***Fostering Personal Values***

Teaching for cultural competency means helping students understand the importance of examining culture and fostering an appreciation of diversity among students rather than apprehension about it. In this sense, the

values of cultural competency are more like dispositions than the “values” that are usually thought of when discussing values education.

There is some evidence that schools can play an important role in fostering open and curious attitudes in students. For example, Oliver established a positive relationship

between racial attitudes of white college students and exposure to practices associated with multicultural education, with curriculum and instruction representing the strongest

influence.<sup>59</sup> Tomlinson, who introduced multicultural reforms in 23 British schools, reports more open, egalitarian, and sensitive attitudes as evidence of the value of multicultural education.<sup>60</sup>

*Teaching about National Values*  
Besides encouraging students to value the process of cultural inquiry, schools that foster cultural competency build in students a strong foundation in the *national*

## The Cultural Inquiry Process

**1. Select as a focus one or more “puzzlements” about a person, practice, belief, or value.** Puzzlements include behaviors or attitudes that one does not understand, whether the unexpected performance is considered as positive, neutral, or negative. By treating a puzzlement as an opportunity to explore cultural influences on a behavior or attitude, individuals increase the likelihood of developing appropriate responses.

**2. Summarize what is already known about the focus person, practice, belief, or value and its context.** Summarize what is known and has been observed about the person and the context. This could include information about gender, social class, and cultural and family background of the observer as well as of the source of the “puzzlement.” In this step, it is important to be aware of the complexity of culture, recognizing that 1) cultural groups may exist on the basis of ethnicity, social class, gender, profession, and other factors, or some combination of these factors; 2) there is considerable variability within cultural groups, and members of a cultural group may not accept all the beliefs, values, and behavior that is the norm in their group; 3) individual students may identify with more than one cultural group; 4) culture is not static; and 5) power relations among people and cultural groups is an important dimension of social relationships.

**3. Consider alternative cultural questions and select one or more of them to explore.** Cultural question(s) are the starting point for cultural explorations. Questions may include such things as: how do personal beliefs and values contribute to the puzzlement; how is the surrounding culture contributing to the puzzlement; could cultural mismatches be augmenting the puzzling situation? Cultural questions draw attention to influences from ethnic and racial cultures as well as to influences from cultures associated with other socially constructed groups like those based on gender, social class, peer groups, and schools. Language is also an important part of cultural questioning. Finally, cultural questions explore the influences of historical events and of larger socio-economic and political structuring.

**4. Gather and analyze relevant information.** In this step, the inquirer takes a “learner” stance and gathers open-ended information to understand others’ perspectives. This step includes gathering information about personal beliefs and values, cultures and cultural mismatches, experiences, meanings, and cultural negotiations of, for example, home, peer, and school cultures.

**5. Develop and implement responses as needed to reduce puzzlement.** Based on the information gathered in Step #4, devise responses to the puzzlement. In the case of schools, these responses could include changes to the personal beliefs of teachers or students, changes in the school’s culture, changes in curriculum, changes in home/school relationships, ways to make explicit to others each individual’s beliefs and experiences, or ways to highlight newly discovered types of cultural negotiations that are occurring.

**6. Monitor the intellectual process and responses.** In this step, the inquirer can gather evidence about the effectiveness of the steps implemented in step #5. This evidence can come, for example, from observation of group or individual behaviors, personal introspection, or discussion with the individual or group that demonstrated the belief or behavior that was the focus of the puzzlement.

—These steps are adapted from the Cultural Inquiry Process website at [classweb.gmu.edu/cip/cip-ind.htm](http://classweb.gmu.edu/cip/cip-ind.htm)

values that undergird and bind our diverse society. They do this by building upon a democratic ideology in which ethnic and cultural diversity is a positive, integral component of our pluralism. By definition, our democracy protects personal freedoms such as ethnic and cultural identity while simultaneously fostering national values such as equality, justice, and human dignity. American notions of equality, justice, and personal freedom become spurious unless public institutions such as schools apply them to *all* Americans. Furthermore, applying these ideals to all Americans strengthens our national commitment to these ideals rather than weakens it. In other words, our identity as a pluralist democracy *requires* that we educate for cultural competency in the same way that we educate for the ideals of freedom, equality, justice, and the rule of law.

Done the right way, multicultural education helps students understand that differences among people do not necessarily imply inferiority or superiority. It also helps students see that conflict is inevitable in a pluralist society and can be an important catalyst for social progress. Students also discover that cooperating for a common goal does not need to be based on identical beliefs, behaviors, or

appearances. All of these awarenesses are critically important to manifesting our national ideals.

Not only are national values strengthened by effective multicultural education, but they provide an important lens through which unfamiliar cultural practices and beliefs may be filtered. Clearly, there are some cultural values, traditions, and beliefs that the United States must reject because they conflict with the fundamental values that sustain our national way of life. Indeed, the United States has a history of granting asylum to individuals that it feels are victims of inappropriate cultural values, traditions, and beliefs. Culturally competent individuals understand that rejecting specific cultural beliefs and practices is very

different than rejecting members of the culture. They also understand that individuals gain valuable insight by analyzing the imperfections and inconsistencies in all cultures, including their own. A pluralist democratic society is most united in its national vision when individuals, groups, and institutions learn to respect and foster the rights of *all* people. "A national culture or school curriculum that does not reflect the voices, struggles, hopes, and dreams of its many peoples is neither democratic nor cohesive."<sup>62</sup>

#### ***Other Issues to Consider***

Finally, the Study Group believes that building a culturally competent curriculum requires policymakers and practitioners to consider several other key points:

### **National Council of the Social Studies Position Statement on Multicultural Education**

[The goals of the position statement] present a vision of our society that recognizes and respects ethnic and cultural diversity as compatible with national and societal unity rather than one that seeks to reduce ethnic and cultural differences. Further progress in that direction is consistent with the democratic ideals—freedom, equality, justice, and human dignity—embodied in our basic national documents. By respecting ethnic and cultural differences, we can help to close the gap between our democratic ideals and societal practices...

The multicultural curriculum should ... promote the basic values expressed in our major historical documents. Each ethnic group should have the right to practice its own religious, social, and cultural beliefs, albeit within the limits of due regard for the rights of others. There is, after all, a set of overarching values that all groups within a society or nation must endorse to maintain societal cohesion. In our nation, these core values stem from our commitment to human dignity, and include justice, equality, freedom, and due process of law. Although the school should value and reflect ethnic and cultural diversity, it should not promote the practices and beliefs of any ethnic or cultural group that contradict the core democratic values of the United States. Rather, the school should foster ethnic and cultural differences that maximize opportunities for democratic living. Pluralism must take place within the context of national unity. *E pluribus unum*—out of many, one—should be our goal.<sup>61</sup>

*Helping students develop cultural competency requires that other cultures not be portrayed as entirely different and distinct from the dominant culture*

Some multicultural curricula emphasize exotic differences among cultures, a practice that can accentuate divisions and feelings of superiority among racial and ethnic groups rather than bridge them. High-quality education for cultural competency helps students understand both what makes cultures unique and what elements of culture are shared among different groups. It also helps students understand that culture is a fundamental element of all human experience.

*Knowledge about other racial, ethnic, and cultural groups is relevant in all schools and communities, not only where people of color live and study*

Fostering multiculturalism in every school—including those that serve students from only one predominant racial, ethnic, or cultural group—is important for several reasons. First, America's history is a story of diverse views and practices converging for the purpose of building a pluralist democracy. Consequently, teaching the story of America accurately to any student, anywhere, requires that the diversity of the nation be portrayed. Secondly, all Americans benefit from knowing about the gap between democratic ideals and realities, since this knowledge helps future generations work to diminish that gap. Finally, denying the opportunity to develop cultural competency to students simply because they live in a homogeneous community also denies these students critical knowledge and skills they will need

to succeed in the larger social and economic life of the country.

*Fostering knowledge about different cultures complements, rather than threatens, the position of the Western canon in our nation's schools*

The Western canon is a venerable contribution to human thought and expression and is in no way diminished by an understanding of non-European social and intellectual history. As a matter of fact, some clearly non-Western works are commonly included in the Western canon, such as Lao-Tze's *Art of War*, and even the staunchest advocates of the canon tend to agree that the likes of Rudyard Kipling, Jack London, Joseph Conrad, William Shakespeare, and Herodotus, among others, require deep knowledge of non-European cultures in order to be fully understood. Understanding of the canon is enriched, and its importance clarified, when placed in the context of the whole of intellectual history.

*Education for cultural competency needs to be built into existing goals and curricula rather than existing as a separate and distinct set of knowledge*

Much like a curriculum for "study skills" or "technology," a culturally competent curriculum spans all subjects. But multicultural education does mean different things in different areas of study; in the sciences, for example, having a multicultural classroom may mean a focus on honoring different learning styles so that traditionally marginalized groups of students can more easily master the curriculum. In an English class, it may mean including a wider range of literature

in the curriculum, and in physical education, it may mean accommodating different types of dress and physical expression.

*Education for cultural competency should not focus exclusively or primarily on the experiences of people of color*  
Education for cultural competency encourages students to examine all cultures respectfully and objectively. Children who are taught to appreciate, understand, and critique their own culture learn to do the same for others' cultures in the process. Furthermore, any responsible understanding of the experiences of people of color in the United States and the world needs to relate these experiences to those of white cultures and form understandings about the ways in which cultures have impacted each other.

**Schools and Personnel that Demonstrate Respect for Students' Homes and Identities**

Fostering a strong sense of cultural connectedness, confidence, and character among all students is a critically important component of culturally competent schooling. Not only does it enrich the educational environment and encourage student engagement in school, but it helps prevent many of the attitudes and behaviors that put students at risk of failure in school and in life.<sup>63</sup>

Affirming students' racial, ethnic, and cultural identity in schools requires simultaneous actions on many fronts:

- Schools need to acknowledge, as much as possible, key elements

## Breaking Down Barriers: Reaching Out to All Parents

Research in parent involvement has taught us that barriers to parent involvement can be overcome. Below are some of the barriers to parent involvement and some possibilities [that can be used] to overcome them.

- **Time.** Be flexible when scheduling meetings. Try different times of the day. Make a meeting a potluck dinner to meet working parents' needs. Have meetings at community centers, apartments, and places of worship.
- **Not feeling valued.** Personally welcome all parents. Learn their interests and abilities. Actively seek opportunities for hesitant parents to use their experiences and talents to benefit the school.
- **Don't know how to contribute.** Conduct a talent survey, then think of ways to use parents' talents. Encourage parents to share information on careers, hobbies, and pets. Arrange for workshops and seminars for parents and community members on leadership and organizational skills.
- **Don't understand the system.** Write a handbook covering rules, procedures, and answers to typical problems.
- **Child care.** Find an available room in the school for child care. Hire students to babysit.
- **Language barrier.** Have printed materials translated. Arrange for an interpreter at meetings.
- **Cultural differences.** Be sensitive to others' values, attitudes, manners, and views of the school. Know the religious holidays and observances of all groups in the school.
- **Transportation.** Visit parents at home. Hold meetings in a convenient place. Arrange for transportation.
- **Not feeling welcome.** Arrange for training in parent involvement for staff. Make sure parents are welcome to drop in during the day. Have a parents' room at school. Post welcome signs in languages spoken at the school.
- **Resistance on the part of leadership.** Investigate whether there may be an unwillingness among some of the existing school leadership to involve others in decision-making.
- **Parents have overwhelming problems.** Provide information and advocacy to help parents secure the services they need, such as food stamps, job training, medical treatment, child care, etc.
- **Low literacy.** Call on the phone. Contact your local library to find literacy groups or tutors of English as a Second Language. Plan a family literacy program.
- **Snobbery.** Actively seek new participants who represent different cultural, socioeconomic, and religious groups in your school. Do not tolerate snobbery during parent programming.

—Iowa Department of Education, *Parent Involvement in Education: A Resource for Parents, Educators, and Communities* (Des Moines, IA: Iowa Department of Education, 1998).

of students' home life by honoring family values, practices, and celebrations;

- Schools need to take the time, during the school day, to acknowledge key historical figures and events from a variety of cultures;
- Schools have to provide materials that accurately reflect different races, cultures, and ethnicities;
- Schools need to give teachers the time and training they need to adapt instruction in order to ensure that all students learn to their highest potential; and
- Schools need to make parents and other family members welcome in school and encourage community groups to become involved in school activities.

Parent and community involvement in schools has proven to be one of the most difficult elements of demonstrating respect for students' home identities. Often family members are reluctant to become involved in their children's education, and among some groups parent interactions with the school range from low to nonexistent.<sup>64</sup> For example, many Hispanic parents view U.S. public schools as "a bureaucracy governed by educated non-Hispanics whom they have no right to question."<sup>65</sup>

There is no one best way to approach parent involvement, and what seems most effective is to encourage a variety of different types of involvement over time. However, there are strong indications of

particular elements of parent involvement that foster the greatest student achievement gains.<sup>66</sup>

- Parent involvement should help parents work directly with their children on learning activities in the home. These programs may include reading in the home, homework support, and parental tutoring.
- More active parent involvement—such as working with children, attending meetings, helping in the classroom and on field trips, and attending student activities—fosters student achievement more than does passive parent involvement like receiving phone calls and signing permission slips.
- Involving parents early in a child's education and continuing that involvement over time leads to more powerful effects on achievement than bringing parents in at the later years.
- Brief, focused orientation and training for parents helps them be more effective in helping their children learn; extensive training, however, produced no greater student achievement gains and often leads to high levels of parent attrition from the program.

### Culturally Competent Schools Respond to Students' Differentiated Learning Needs

Schools that take seriously the mission of educating all students to

high standards need to take into account the fact that students have differentiated learning needs. This is true in any classroom but is particularly critical in schools that serve diverse students, since culturally specific childhood socialization practices foster the development of particular ways of understanding and engaging with information among students.<sup>67</sup>

Teachers that are most effective at serving students from diverse backgrounds are good teachers in general. They are competent enough with a range of teaching techniques that they can alter their practice to respond to the specific needs of individual students. For example, students may fail to learn for several reasons:

- Limited opportunities to make choices;
- Lack of predictability in the daily schedule;
- Inadequate level of assistance;
- Poor directions;
- Lack of fluency in English;
- Activities that are too difficult;
- Activities take too long to complete;
- Student dislikes the activity;
- Student doesn't understand the criterion for completion of the activity; or
- Student doesn't see the utility of the knowledge or activity.

Students can also be distracted by anxiety, hunger, anger, fatigue, illness, medication side effects, other students, or extraneous stimuli. Understanding how each student learns best, and under what conditions they simply cannot learn, is a critical component of culturally competent schooling—indeed of any effective teaching and learning.

The Study Group believes it is important to mention the unique needs of English Language Learners (ELLs) in public schools. Many of the issues faced by diverse learners are compounded for children who may come from a different culture and cannot speak English. In addition, for immigrant and migrant children, their education program may have been significantly disrupted once or several times throughout their school career. As with other “second-system” students, researchers have found that ELLs are not taught the same material nor do they frequently have access to all the courses other students do. ELLs are also shortchanged because they are placed in less demanding academic tracks and are taught by less experienced teachers.<sup>68</sup> In addition, many teachers lack an understanding of second language development despite high concentrations of ELLs in their classrooms. In 1994, the National Education Goals Panel found that while 43 percent of secondary school teachers had ELLs in their classrooms, only about half of them had received training on how to teach second language learners.<sup>69</sup>

The Study Group believes that serving differentiated learning needs in classrooms is a critical

part of education for cultural competency and is a fundamental component of our nation's commitment to fairness and equal opportunity. Evidence in terms of learning needs is clear: if all students are treated alike in a classroom, their distinctive needs are not being met, and they are being denied access to equal educational opportunities.<sup>70</sup>

Giving teachers the tools they need to serve differentiated learning needs requires policymakers to consider several issues:

- **Time.** Teachers need dedicated time to consider and respond to individual learning needs.
- **Professional development.** Teachers need to learn about a variety of ways to evaluate students' knowledge, performance, and learning styles and then cater to the differentiated learning needs of individual students.
- **Richness of materials.** Teachers need to have at their disposal a variety of high-quality educational materials that can be used to engage students with different needs and preferences.
- **Class size.** Teachers need to have fewer students to help them focus on students as individual learners.
- **Community connectedness.** Teachers can learn from community members about culturally specific customs and practices that may help engage students in learning.

## Qualified Personnel in All Schools and for All Students

### *Qualified Teachers*

NASBE and other education organizations and researchers have written extensively about the need for and policy actions necessary to bring qualified teachers to all students.<sup>71</sup> This is obviously an enormous challenge, however, with specific issues ranging from recruitment, teacher preparation, and certification to professional development, retaining qualified teachers in the profession, and ensuring that the best teachers are working with the students who need them the most.

From a policy perspective, putting qualified teachers in every classroom begins with a systemwide strategy at the state and district levels to attract, train, keep, and develop skilled teachers. Among a number of states and urban districts instituting more comprehensive reforms, Connecticut stands out as one of the most successful, as reflected in the state's top rankings on a number of achievement tests and by the narrowing gap between scores of white students and students of color. Moreover, over the last decade, the state has moved from teacher shortages and emergency credentialing to a teacher surplus.

Linda Darling-Hammond identifies the following policies and activities that have supported Connecticut's progress:<sup>72</sup>

- significantly increasing and equalizing teacher salaries;

- raising licensing standards and eliminating emergency licensing;
- adding to requirements for teacher education in the areas of reading, working with special needs students, and employing research-based practices;
- creation of scholarships to attract top candidates in fields experiencing shortages and for schools serving at-risk populations;
- provision of mentoring and an assessment program for all beginning teachers;
- significant investment in professional development for proven, effective programs and strategies;
- alignment of both student and teaching standards;

- encouraging the linkage of teacher evaluation to teacher standards; and
- creation of low-stakes tests that districts and schools can use diagnostically.

one-third of public school students are individuals of color, only about 10 percent of teachers are.<sup>73</sup> The lack of well-qualified teachers and administrators across all levels only perpetuates the perception and likely reality of a power imbalance

across racial and ethnic lines. In order to go beyond superficial changes, teachers and leaders from diverse cultural and ethnic groups are needed to truly transform education and bring to fruition the promise of equality and excellence.

**Knowledgeable and Inspiring School Leaders**

As education policymakers consider a wide range of education reform efforts, they have come to recognize that principals have a great impact on both the implementation and sustainability of

these reforms.<sup>74</sup> They feel that good principals lead change, inspire students and staff, leverage resources to make improvement happen, and bring community members into the process of change.

**Seven Common Elements of High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools**

- **Principals must be free ...** to decide how to spend their money, whom to hire, and what to teach.
- **Principals use measurable goals to establish a culture of achievement.**
- **Master teachers bring out the best in a faculty....** Effective principals turn their schools into schools for teachers. Master teachers teach the others how to teach.
- **Rigorous and regular testing leads to continuous student achievement.** Principals take personal responsibility for the success of their children ... [by] personally monitoring the regular assessment of every child.
- **Achievement is the key to discipline....** When a school clearly teaches by example that self-control, self-reliance, and self-esteem anchored in achievement are the means to success and that school's own success inspires confidence, order, and discipline in its students.
- **Principals work actively with parents to make the home a center of learning.**
- **Effort creates ability.** Principals expect their students and staff members to work hard.

—S.C. Carter, *No Excuses: Lessons from 21 High-Performing, High-Poverty Schools* (Washington, DC: Heritage Foundation, 2000).

Another factor that impedes the success of students of color is the under-representation of educators of color. In recent decades diversity among the nation's teaching force has actually decreased; while over

Today's principals are expected to run schools that are well-managed and that offer demanding academic programs and teaching practices. Principals are also expected to lead schools that address the emotional, social, and health needs of diverse student populations. The members of the Study Group feel this is particularly true if we are to succeed in preparing all children to thrive in a diverse society.

Good principals are essential to create a cross-cultural learning community. They also are critical in efforts to raise the consciousness of teachers and

others in the school about the value and importance of closing the achievement gap and preparing students for diversity. Good principals also inspire school personnel and students to transcend their biases and motivate the school community to overcome resource limitations in order to achieve a shared vision of *all* students achieving to high standards of excellence and prepared to thrive in a diverse society and workforce. We need principals that are transformational leaders.

For example, Liable and Harrington studied two principals who led schools attended primarily by

African American and Mexican American students.<sup>75</sup> Both schools used to experience high rates of

community, and 4) were able to see beyond stereotypes and get to know the personal histories of their students.

### NASBE Recommendations to State Policymakers for Fostering Strong Principals

- Set standards for principals and require regular principal evaluation according to the knowledge, skills, and dispositions defined in the standards.
- Enforce high standards for accreditation of principal preparation programs.
- Recruit principals for hard-to-staff schools.
- Provide alternative routes to principal certification.
- Provide formal induction programs to support new principals.
- Augment and target professional development to provide training and assistance to principals throughout their careers.
- Help retain current, excellent principals by improving the support, services, and growth opportunities available to principals.<sup>76</sup>

As is the case with teachers, the number of principals from communities of color is small. It is imperative then, that education leaders implement strategies both to recruit qualified principals from communities of color and to ensure that regardless of their ethnic, cultural, and racial background, all principals can ensure that their schools are capable of serving the needs of students from diverse communities.

failure and disconnect from their communities but experienced a dramatic turn-around into high-performing, high-achieving schools. The study revealed that parents, teachers, and students gave these principals the bulk of the credit for the schools' transformation. Looking at the characteristics of these principals, Liable and Harrington found that they: 1) believed that all students can learn and are entitled to quality education; 2) were willing to step outside the box to address the issues and challenges confronted by their students and schools; 3) fostered a shared vision, mission, and commitment within the school, as well as between the school and the

### Extra Help for Schools and Students Who Need It

Clearly, expecting higher levels of achievement for all students will not be successful if students and schools that are having trouble reaching the new standards do not receive the help they need. State board members have made this issue a priority for a number of years—yet the complexities and challenges of ensuring that this help exists for every student, classroom, school, and district are daunting. Fortunately, a number of states, through their accountability

systems, have moved ahead systematically to fulfill their promise of providing assistance. Following are several examples of assistance efforts that are or could be targeted to students, teachers, and schools.

### **Assistance for Students**

New state standards and accountability programs that evaluate achievement in relation to standards provide rich information that can be used to target assistance to students who need it most. In New York, for example, the state requires schools to develop an Academic Intervention Services (AIS) plan for students whose test results in English and math (K-12) and social studies and science (grades 4-12) show that they are below grade level. Funding for the assistance is available for both additional instruction as well as student support services, which may include guidance, counseling, working on study skills, and improving student attendance.

North Carolina's Student Accountability System has now established four "gateways" for students at grades 3, 5, 8, and for graduation. All students must meet both local promotion requirements and attain a passing score on the state assessment in order to move on to the next grade or graduate. Students who are not promoted will receive extra help in smaller classes or additional instructional opportunities, and may also be provided with a personalized education plan outlining the strategies to be used to assist each student.

James McPartland, who works at the Johns Hopkins University's Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk (CRESPAR),

also makes the point that "it's never too late to help older students."<sup>77</sup> CRESPAR has designed the Talent Development High School model for comprehensively restructuring troubled high schools challenged by high poverty rates and high numbers of students of color, low achievement scores, and poor graduation rates. Components of this model include:

- The "Ninth Grade Success Academy," a special school-within-a-school that allows students promoted to high school with poor basic skills to take a "double-dose" curriculum in English and math, uses interdisciplinary team teaching and flexible block scheduling, and includes a Freshman Seminar that helps students improve social and study skills.
- Career Academies that provide all students with a core college preparatory curriculum as well as work-based learning experiences designed in accordance with local employers' needs.
- Extra teacher support including classroom-level assistance on model lessons and effective instructional strategies, peer teachers providing weekly in-class assistance, and additional assistance from lead teachers and facilitators from Johns Hopkins.
- An on-site alternative school for students who need more intensive help and oversight with behavior problems. This program, often called a Twilight School, operates after hours with smaller classes and carefully selected teachers.

### **Assistance and Support for Teachers**

NASBE's report on teacher quality, *The Numbers Game*, makes several recommendations for assisting teachers in high-poverty schools or schools with a very diverse student population. These include:

- Ensuring that professional development is specifically targeted to the needs of teachers, children, and youth in urban schools, schools in poverty, and other high-risk situations;
- Providing more planning time for teachers so they have more time to develop strategies for working with students who have highly divergent needs and learning styles;
- Ensuring that class sizes are smaller so that student instruction can be appropriately individualized;
- Providing comprehensive teacher induction programs that pay attention to the realities of teaching in these schools; and
- Providing high-quality resources, materials, and facilities.

Adding to these recommendations, the Study Group on the Changing Face of America's School Children suggests that states give specific consideration to the knowledge, skills, and resources teachers may need to foster cultural competency among all students. Fostering the necessary knowledge and skills among teachers may require policymakers to study not only the

professional development needs of practicing teachers but also the preparation programs and student teaching experiences that bring new teachers into the system.

### ***Assistance for Schools and Districts***

There are several ways that states can assist schools and districts in serving the needs of all students. Fundamentally, though, most types of assistance can be categorized as technical, financial, or political.

#### ***Technical Assistance***

Schools that fail to develop a high-quality, culturally competent program to serve all of their students often lack the know-how they need to improve. States can play a critical role in building professional capacity within schools that need it most. For example, North Carolina uses State Assistance Teams to help troubled schools that have been identified by its accountability system. The teams are usually composed of five members, including practicing teachers and administrators, retired educators, and college professors who are assigned to one school as a full-time job for one year. After extensive training prior to their assignment, a team works with school staff to identify problem areas and develop a school improvement action plan.

Kentucky was one of the first states to provide direct assistance to low-performing schools, through a program using Distinguished Educators. That system has now been replaced by one that uses a review conducted by a scholastic audit team appointed by the State Board. The audit team recommends the areas that need to be targeted

and the kind of assistance that needs to take place, as well as whether the school needs a more intense program of outside assistance.

Some states target districts instead of individual schools for assistance. New Jersey was one of the first states to use a systematic review process for districts, through which 1) successful districts receive a certification from the State Board good for seven years; 2) other districts receive a conditional certification, meaning that improvement must be made but without state intervention; or 3) troubled districts are placed in Level II status, which brings state involvement in the improvement effort. If the district still fails to meet its goals, there is increasing state involvement and assistance, leading eventually to state takeover in extreme cases. While state takeovers in the urban districts of Jersey City, Newark, and Patterson have attracted the most attention, state officials have long maintained that the most positive benefits of the process come in those cases where interventions at the earlier stages have helped bring about improvements that lead to district certification.

#### ***Financial Assistance***

In most states across the nation, schools that serve the neediest students do so with the least resources (see "State and Local Revenues per Student, in Dollars" on page 27). States that take seriously their commitment to bringing all students to high standards in schools that foster cultural competency need to see to it that financial resources are targeted to the schools that need the most support.

#### ***Political Assistance***

Many effective schools already know the importance of community and business support. Schools that leverage the private, corporate, and non-profit resources outside their doors often find that they gain public visibility, political power, volunteer resources, and money that help them improve their status in the community, their acceptance among parents and community members, and, most importantly, their ability to serve all students that come through their doors. But leveraging the business and non-profit resources within a community is a skill that few principals and even fewer teachers know a lot about. States can play an important part in helping school leaders build relationships with powerful elements in the community that can bring valuable human, political, and financial resources into schools.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, the Study Group believes that a strong vision that understands and embraces diversity and establishes a culture of high achievement for all students is required if all students are to be successful. At every level, it is imperative that educators demonstrate the commitment, understanding, and persistence to raise controversial issues regarding the inequities of the educational system. What is essential is an open dialogue to deconstruct misperceptions, stereotypes, and belief systems that perpetuate superiority and inferiority based on race and ethnicity. The way we think about differences among students, how we view the purposes of elementary and secondary education, the way we choose to

organize schools and the forging of school connections with families and communities are all fundamental to the principle that positive

outcomes must be realized for every student. The challenge is in identifying the practices that deny, and those that promote, the right to

schooling success. As a nation, we can no longer afford to provide the meager fare we do to millions of America's youth.

### Policymakers' Checklist

In order to successfully educate a culturally diverse student population, education policymakers and administrators must create a culturally competent education system. Such a system will:

- Expect *all* students to achieve high standards of excellence;
- Expect all students to value, honor, and analyze their immediate culture and the cultures of others;
- Encourage students to identify values common among their immediate culture and the cultures of others;
- Help all students develop a sense of civic responsibility toward their immediate community, the nation, and the world;
- Foster in students the confidence to interact with people from diverse backgrounds;
- Provide curricula and instructional programs that are culturally inclusive and engage students from all cultural backgrounds;
- Eliminate all forms of stereotyping and discrimination in curriculum materials, support services, extracurricular activities, and the general school environment;
- Involve parents and other community members in a number of important ways that invite home cultures into school and foster high achievement among students from all racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds;
- Provide *all* students with the same enriching, evidence-based educational opportunities that will help them achieve to high standards of excellence;
- Encourage students as well as staff to engage in ongoing cultural analysis that is based on shared national values;
- Use unbiased assessments and diagnostic tools to measure academic progress and determine instructional and support service needs;
- Ensure that there is no funding gap between high-poverty and low-poverty school districts;
- Ensure that teachers, administrators, and all other personnel have the knowledge and skills to work with and proactively engage students from all cultural backgrounds; and
- Recruit qualified school personnel who represent the cultural, ethnic, and gender make-up of the communities being served.

## *Afterword*

# Promoting Unity in a Diverse Society

*by Brenda Lilienthal Welburn, NASBE Executive Director*

The Study Group on the Changing Face of America's School Children faced a daunting task as it began its deliberations. The role of public schools in educating a diverse population to high standards while promoting national unity and understanding of different cultures is fundamentally uncharted territory for education policymakers. With guidance from this and other reports and input from an array of individuals and groups, it is an issue that state and local boards of education need to explore comprehensively and with profound sensitivity. Nothing less than the principles of the Constitution and the future of the country rest on the ability of the nation's education leaders to create learning environments that affirm the importance of nationhood and teach all students to a common set of standards while celebrating and recognizing the uniqueness of every child. There is no American institution, other than the public

school, that has the opportunity or the obligation to develop and promote a collective spirit of national unity. With the support and guidance of policymakers, schools can define what is meant by a national identity in a pluralistic society. They can do this through what is taught and how it is taught. And yet caution demands that the approach to instruction about national unity balances a respect for the values and experiences that students bring into the classroom with instruction that speaks to and honors the common bonds shared by the citizens of this nation.

Following the tragic events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, school leaders struggled with the delicate balance of promoting patriotism, respecting the ethnic and religious differences of all students, and explaining the complex political, cultural, and religious dynamics of the Middle East. Typical of the response to

unanticipated events, political leaders and educators alike gravitated to a very basic reaction, requiring the Pledge of Allegiance or other symbolic actions of patriotism, while encouraging tolerance of all people. The reactions varied between states and among communities because there was limited policy guidance available to leaders to help them navigate these sensitive issues. Clearly, this response was unavoidable because policymakers have not tackled the fundamental issue of how to balance national unity, civil liberties, and cultural diversity in the nation's schools. Standing now at the crossroads of history, education policymakers have an opportunity to define these issues for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The way in which national unity and cultural diversity are promoted in the public school is primarily through the curricula and through observations and celebrations. Given

the demographic diversity that has been a hallmark of this country, it is no surprise that the curricular areas where the development of academic standards has encountered the greatest stumbling blocks are the fields of history, social studies, and civics education. Philosophical differences have hampered the strong consensus that has been experienced in other disciplines about what is good, accurate, and important for instruction. Consequently, schools have missed an opportunity to celebrate the unique American experience and to teach how the contributions of many people from many lands have made that experience possible. Teaching students about the truth of some of the darker events in our history, juxtaposed with the significance of being an American and enjoying the benefits of that history, is a mammoth challenge for educators.

At the most basic level, public schools must teach vigorously about the quest for freedom that is an integral part of our nation's history. They must emphasize why the country remains unique among world nations in continuing to attract others from around the globe who want to share in that freedom, and why so many people from around the world immigrate annually to this country. Simultaneously, students should be taught that irrespective of from where they or their forebears hail or how they got here, they have an obligation to carry, protect, and advance the torch of freedom for generations that follow.

A vignette in NASBE's first report on diversity, *An American Tapestry: Educating a Nation*, told of a 5<sup>th</sup>-

grade student who could not identify Crispus Attucks' contributions to the American Revolution because the class "[hadn't] gotten to Black people yet." Now ten years later, students are still frequently taught about the contributions of Americans of color solely in the context of their diversity, not in their belief of the American creed. Students should be taught about the achievements of people of color as people who believed in this country, and who were, and are, partners in making this country the advanced nation that it is. Public education should not shy away from the candid realities of America's past, but neither should it allow students to use that past as an excuse to disengage from a national dialogue and perspective. Loyalty to culture should not be at the expense of allegiance to this nation. Conversely, valuing one's culture should not be deemed as un-American. A comprehensive and integrated curriculum can support the goal of preserving cultural respect and knowledge while educating the citizens of a united nation.

The core of the standards-based reform movement that has engulfed the country over the last several years is based on "what we want students to know and be able to do" when they leave public schools. Policymakers have an opportunity to support strong citizenship through the standards movement. They can promote an examination of how to prepare students to live in a multicultural society that abides as one nation supporting a common good.

Over the last several years, schools have justifiably expanded recognition and celebrations of the

various cultures and ethnic groups represented in the nation and in the nation's public schools. Yet, with all the celebrations we have throughout the school year, we do not have a common day, week, or month celebrating what it means to be an American. The most significant holiday in celebration of our history is the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, which is outside of the school year. As school calendars are developed that include observations of culture and diversity, consideration should be given to highlighting American culture over a sustained period of time. For the spirit of unity to thrive, we must be as vigilant at celebrating our American culture as we are at extolling the virtues of our divergent backgrounds.

How schools promote individual achievement, national unity, collective interests, and cultural diversity in a balanced way is one of the most profound issues policymakers will face in the years to come. Hitler used the notion of national unity to justify atrocities to millions of German citizens. Policymakers must be watchful to ensure good intentions are not translated into oppressive actions. To safeguard the principles of the Constitution and the future of the country, the issues of cultural diversity and competency must be addressed in their broadest sense. Yet the vision of those who framed the Constitution must be honored and taught. All students must learn to work and live in a society that grows more diverse every day. All children should be taught of the sacrifices made by tens of thousands to secure America's freedom. All students must learn to value America, with all its strengths, all its potential, and all its people.

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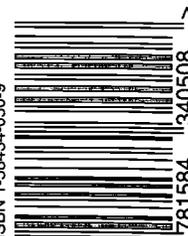
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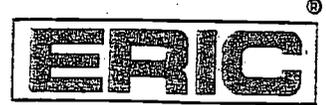
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